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AN ACCIDENTAL
HONEYMOON





By DAVID POTTER

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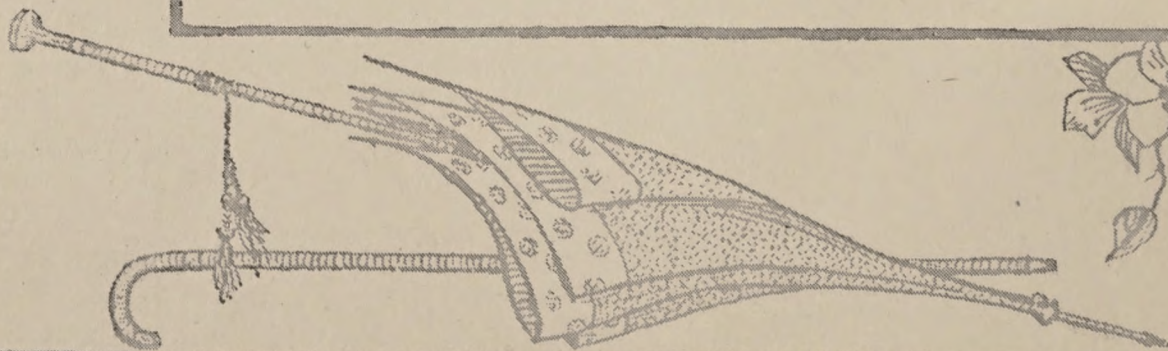
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ALL THAT GOLDEN AFTERNOON THEY SAILED, AND ALL THE AFTERNOON
THEY TALKED

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AN ACCIDENTAL HONEYMOON

By
DAVID POTTER

Author of "The Lady of the Spur," "I Fasten a Bracelet," etc.

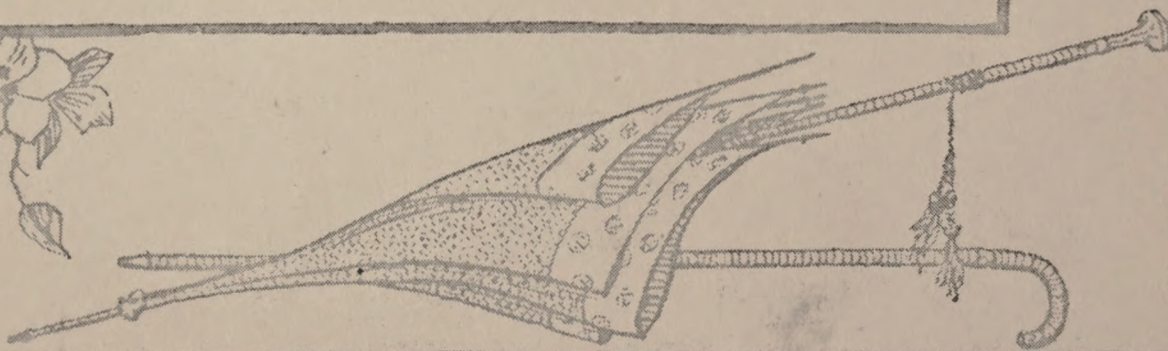
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EDWARD STRATTON HOLLOWAY



PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1911



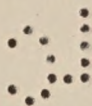
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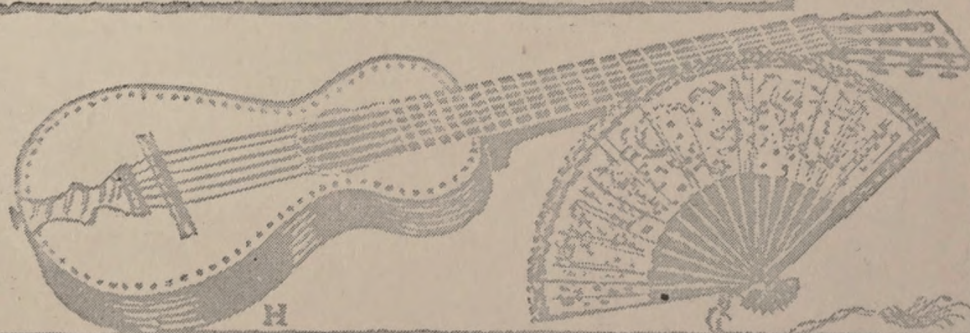



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ILLUSTRATIONS

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MR. FRANCIS CHARLES MCDONALD, OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, IS THE AUTHOR OF THE POEM, "BOB WHITE," MADE USE OF IN THIS STORY. I BEG TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE FOR HIS PERMISSION TO AVAIL MYSELF OF IT.





AN ACCIDENTAL HONEYMOON

I

FESSENDEN put the girl gently down on the flat rock at the edge of the stream.

"There you are, little woman," he said. "You really ought to be careful how you go splashing about. If you hadn't screamed in time——"

"Did I scream?"

"Rather! Lucky you did."

"I didn't scream because I was afraid. I stumbled and—and I thought I saw an eel in that pool, ready to bite me. Eels *do* bite."

"Undoubtedly—horribly!"

He stepped back with a little flourish of the hat in his hand. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I took you for a child. That dress, you know, and——"



“And my being in paddling.”

“I’m afraid I’ve been rather presumptuous.”

The color in her cheeks deepened a little. “Not at all. It’s my own fault. This afternoon—just for an hour or two—I’ve been dreaming—pretending I wasn’t grown up. It’s so sad to be grown up.”

His eyes sparkled with instant sympathy. “After all, are you so *very* old?”

She was seventeen or thereabouts, he guessed—a girl lately arrived at womanhood. Her hair was arranged in a bewildering fashion, requiring a ribbon here and there to keep its blonde glory within bounds. Beneath the dark brows and darker lashes blue eyes showed in sudden flashes—like the glint of bayonets from an ambush. The delicately rounded cheeks, just now a little blushing, and the red-lipped mouth, made her look absurdly young.

She had sunk to a seat upon the rock. One foot was doubled under her, and the other, a white vision veiled by the water, dangled uncertainly, as if inclined to seek the retirement possessed by its fellow. His gaze lingered on the curve of throat and shoulder.

“If Phidias were only alive——” he said.

“Phidias?”





“BUT YOU’VE BEEN STANDING IN THE WATER ALL THIS TIME!
WHAT AM I THINKING OF!”

"A Greek friend of mine, dead some years. He would have loved to turn you into marble."

She gave a little crowing laugh, delightful to hear. "I'd much rather stay alive."

"You are right. Better be a Greek goddess alive, than one dead."

She laughed again. "You're—unusual."

He bowed with another flourish. "Then, so are you."

Their eyes met frankly. "Thank you for coming to my rescue," she said. "But you've been standing in the water all this time! What am I thinking of! Come up here."

She sprang to her feet, as if to make room for him upon the rock, but sank back quickly. He gave her a scrutinizing glance.

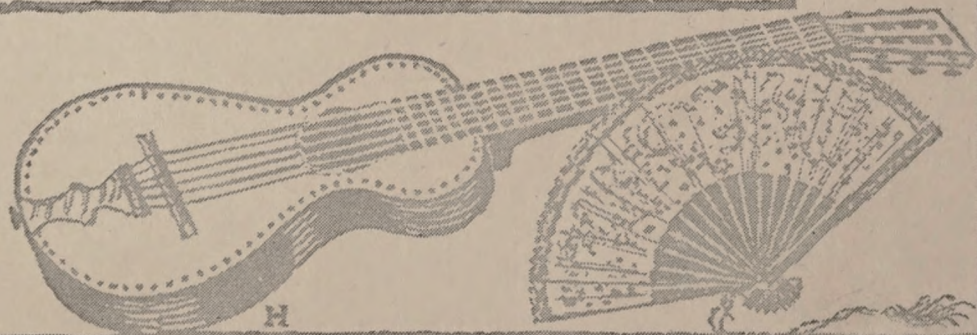
"What was that I heard?"

"I asked you to get out of that horrid water. It must be frightfully cold."

He shook an admonitory finger. "Bravely done, but you can't fool me so easily. I heard a moan, and—and I won't remark that you're crying."

"You'd—better not."

"You hurt yourself when you stumbled." His firm hand was on her shoulder.



"No—n-o. Well, even if I did turn my ankle, I'm not crying. It's very tactless of you to notice."

He tried to catch a glimpse of the slim leg through the dancing water. It swung back in vigorous embarrassment.

"The other ankle, then?"

"Ye-es."

"I'm awfully sorry. Can't I do something?"

"I think I'll go home."

"But you can't walk."

"I think so. Isn't this just too tiresome? I *will* walk."

She rose to her feet at the word, but, once there, gave a cry, and stood tottering. His arm caught her about the waist.

"Where do you live? Near here anywhere?"

"Oh, yes; just up the lane. But it might as well be ten miles." Her brave laugh was half a sob.

"Not a bit of it! Hold tight."

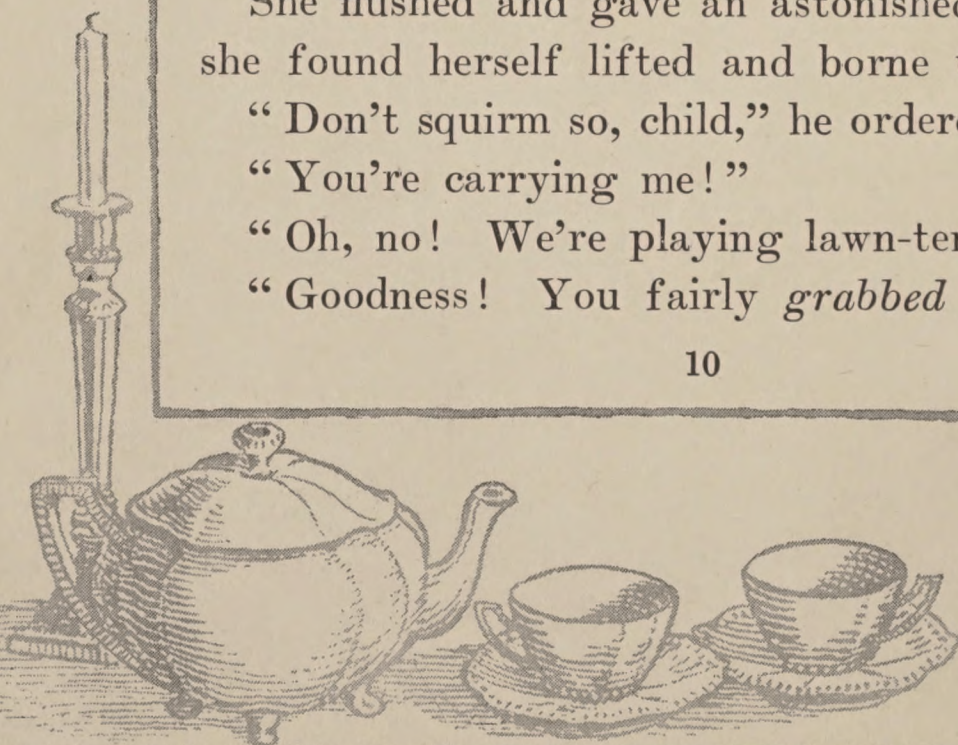
She flushed and gave an astonished wriggle as she found herself lifted and borne up the lane.

"Don't squirm so, child," he ordered.

"You're carrying me!"

"Oh, no! We're playing lawn-tennis."

"Goodness! You fairly *grabbed* me."



“Perhaps I ought to have asked your permission, but if I had you might have refused it.”

She laughed. “I think I should.”

“It’s too late now,” he said contentedly. “Does the foot hurt?”

“Not much, thank you—thank you, Mr. ——”

He was obdurately silent. She tried again.

“Thank you, Mr. —— Please, what’s your name?”

“‘Puddin’ Tame,’” he laughed.

“‘Where do you live?’” she chanted delightedly.

“‘Down the lane.’ No, *you* live down the lane.”

“It isn’t far now. Are you tired?”

“Oh, no! I’m doing very well, thank you.”

“Perhaps you’d better rest.”

“By no means. I hope you live over the hills and far away.”

“You aren’t bashful, are you, Mr. Puddin’ Tame?”


“H’m.” He peered down at the injured ankle. “How’s the foot?”

“A little—cold.”

“I’m afraid the wrench has interfered with the circulation. Poor child!”

“Really, it doesn’t hurt—not much.”






"I see you were born to be a heroine."

"And you're a 'knight comes riding by, riding by, riding by'——"

" 'So early in the morning,' " he finished. "If the knight were sure you thought so"—his eyes were on her cheek—"he might claim a knight's reward."

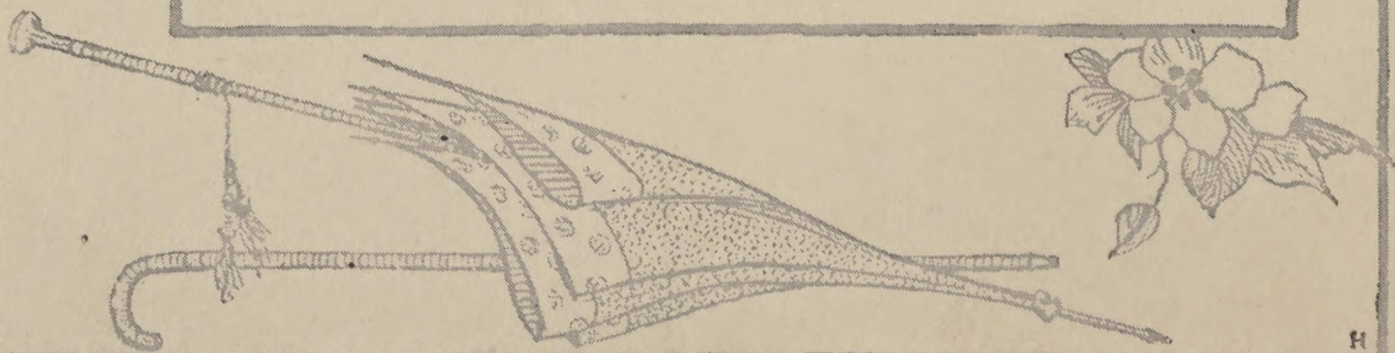

She fell abruptly silent.




The Maryland spring was well advanced, and the path along which they moved was carpeted with flowers. The blue bells of the wild myrtle swung almost at their feet. Scarlet runners rioted over the low stone wall at their hand. The sycamores and oaks were clothed in tenderest green. Beyond the left-hand wall, rows of peach-trees marched away, flaunting banners of pink and white.

Fessenden heard the tinkle of the brook, winding in the shadow of everhanging banks. Sights and sounds lulled him. He felt himself in harmony with the quiet mood of the girl in his arms.

Truly this was an unexpected adventure! His eyes rested upon the piquant face so near his own. It possessed a refinement of outline that was belied by the humble fashion of her gown and by the position in which he had surprised her. The precocious daughter of a farmer, per-





haps, or at best the neglected child of one of the war-ruined "first families of the South."

He found himself speculating upon the sort of house he was likely to discover at the end of the lane—perhaps a crumbling colonial mansion, equipped with a Confederate colonel and a faithful former slave or two.

He smiled unconsciously at the red mouth, and was somewhat disconcerted to find the blue eyes watching him.

"Were you making fun of me, Mr. Puddin' Tame?"

"Word of honor, no! I was smiling to be in harmony with the day, I fancy."

"Maryland *is* lovely. You're a Northern man, aren't you?"

"I freely admit it. But I'm on my way to a house-party at Sandywood."

"Sandywood?"

"Yes. You know it, of course?"

"Of course. It's just over the hill from the Landis house—our house. Sandywood is the old Cary place."

"I don't know. I'm to visit a family named Cresap."

"It's the same place. The Cresaps are only occupying it for a while."

"Then you know Mrs. Cresap?"

"Hum-m. Aunty Landis knows her, but I suppose she doesn't know *us*—not in the way you mean. I live with Aunt Katey Landis at White Cottage. Uncle Bob Landis supplies Sandywood with eggs and butter and milk."

"Oh, I see."

"You've never been on the Eastern Shore before?"

"Never. But I've learned to like it already. To rescue a girl from man-eating eels, and——"

"Girls don't go in wading every day, even on the Eastern Shore."

"If they did, I'd walk over from the railroad station straight through the year."

"From Sandywood Station?"

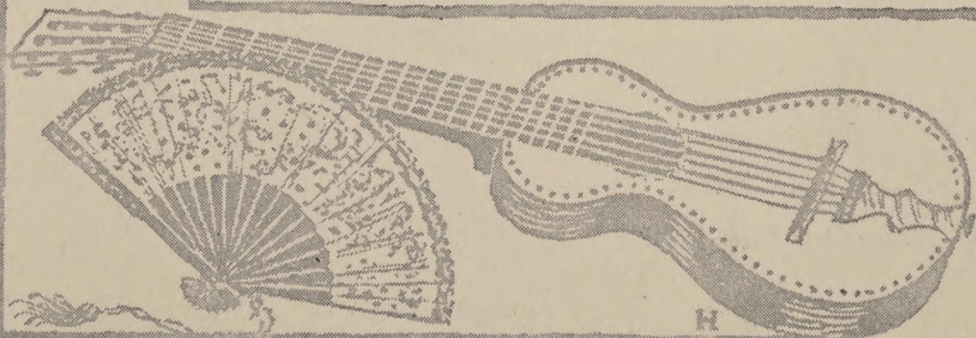
"Yes. I was delayed in Baltimore on account of meeting a friend there, so there wasn't any one at the station to meet me. I'm a good walker, and——"

"And the fairies led you down the wood-road in time to save disobedient me."

"Disobedient?"

She nodded. "Aunty Landis told me that I mustn't go in wading. She said it was not becoming—that it was very improper."

"How unreasonable!"



"That's what I thought. But I wish now I'd obeyed her."

"But that would have meant that the poor knight would have ridden by without an excuse for knowing you."

"Alas! Well, your task is nearly done. We must be near White Cottage."

"Don't say that."

She glanced about, and then gave a wriggle so violent that she almost slipped from his arms.

"Put me down!"

"What's the matter?"

"We're nearer than I thought. There's the big oak. The lane comes right up to the back door. The house is on the main road, you know. Put me down!"

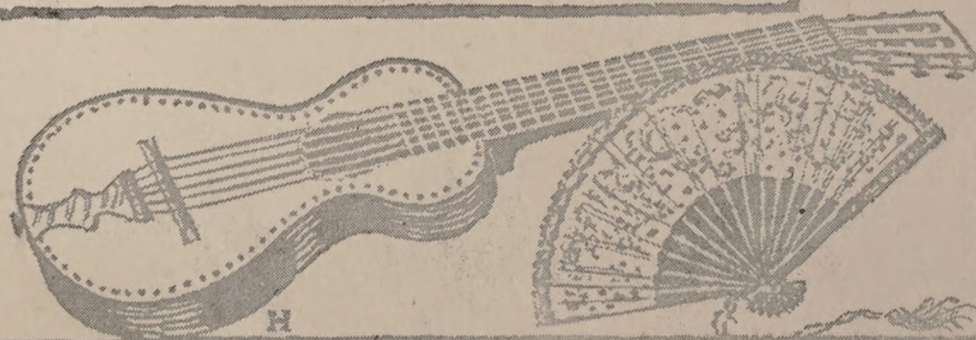
"But why shouldn't I carry you into the house?"


"Because—oh, because Aunty Landis would be terribly frightened! She'd think something dreadful had happened to me. Please put me down. I can limp along, if you'll let me use your arm."

He allowed her to slip slowly to the ground. "There you are, then; but be careful."

A sigh of relief escaped her as she tried her weight gingerly on the injured foot.

"It's ever so much better. I won't even have





to hop." Her face was upturned earnestly. "Thank you very much, Mr. Puddin' Tame. You've been very kind."

"You're very welcome," he returned, and, seized by a sudden paternal tenderness, he stooped and kissed the red-lipped mouth.

She stepped back with a sharp "Oh!" mingled of anger and the pain of her twisted ankle. "Oh! Why did you do that? We were having such fun, and—and now you've spoiled the whole afternoon. What a—a perfectly silly thing to do!"

He quailed before the bayonets flashing in the blue eyes.

"I was carried away," he said humbly.

"I hate you!"

"No, no. Don't—please don't do that. Of course I was wrong—unpardonably wrong, I suppose—but you looked so young, and—well, so adorable, that I—— Oh, please don't hate me!"

His gloom was so profound that, in spite of herself, she felt her wrath begin to melt.

"If you're sure you're very sorry——"

"I'm in the dust," he evaded.

"Then—all right." She smiled a little, but with caution—he should not be allowed to think himself too easily restored to favor. "I frightened you, didn't I? And you ought to have

been frightened. But to show you I trust you now, I'll use your arm as a crutch. Come on. Oh, *what* a delicious sight for poor Aunt Landis!"

Truly enough, the spectacle brought to her feet a motherly-looking woman who had been knitting on the porch of White Cottage.

"Good gracious, child! What's the matter?" She fluttered down the steps to meet the bedraggled adventurers. "Have you hurt yourself, dearie? Oh, dear, dear! What is it? Have you broken your leg?"


"I'm all right, Aunt. Don't worry. My ankle *might* be turned a little, that's all. This gentleman has been very kind to me, and helped me home."

The woman made Fessenden a spasmodic bow. "I'm sure we're much obliged to you, sir. Is it your ankle, dearie? I told you not to go in wading. The idea of such a thing, and you a young lady!"

"Now, Aunt, please don't scold me—not until my foot's fixed, at any rate."

Although the girl's lips quivered warningly, Fessenden could have sworn her eyes laughed slyly. But the older woman's vexation was effectually dissolved by the other's pitiful tone.





“There, there! You poor silly baby! Come right in, and I’ll put your foot in hot water and mustard. That’ll take the soreness out.” She passed her arm lovingly about the girl’s slender shoulders and was leading her away without more ado. The girl hung back.

“Aunty, I haven’t thanked him—half.”

“I’m sure the gentleman’s been very good,” said Mrs. Landis, “but he knows your foot ought to be soaked in hot water just as soon as can be. There won’t be any too much time to do it before supper, any way.”

“By all means,” agreed Fessenden. “I’m very glad if I’ve been of service.” Michief awoke in his glance. “I’ve had ample reward for anything I’ve been able to do.”

The blood crept into the girl’s cheeks, but she was not afraid to meet his eyes.


“Good-by,” he said with evident reluctance. “I hope your ankle will be well very soon.” The laughing imps in her eyes suddenly emboldened him. “May I come to-morrow evening to see how you’re getting on?”

“Of course—if you like. We’re through supper by half-past seven, and——”

“Supper?” he returned, and paused so pointedly that the girl laughed outright.



HE WAVED HIS HAT FROM THE GATE



“O-oh! Would you care to come to supper with us, really?”

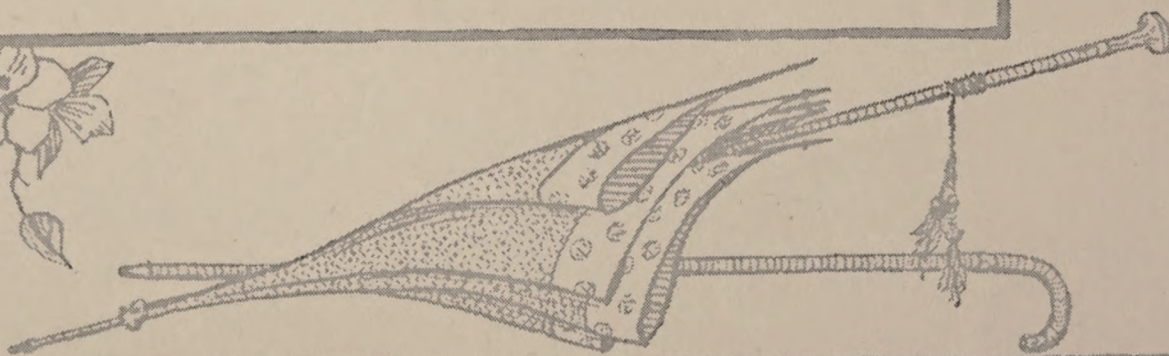

“Don’t ask me unless you’re in earnest.”

“Will you come, then, at half-past six?”

“I’ll come. Thank you—immensely. Good-night. Good-night, Mrs. Landis.”

“Good-night, good-night, Mr. Puddin’ Tame,” called the girl as she hobbled up the steps, supported on the older woman’s arm.

He waved his hat from the gate, and the girl blew him a smiling kiss—to the very evident embarrassment of Aunty Landis.





II

FESSENDEN turned to the right on the main road. At a little distance he paused to glance back at White Cottage.

There was nothing of the colonial manor-house in its lines. Clearly, it had always been the home of humble folk. He fancied that good Aunt Landis—whose husband supplied Sandywood “with eggs and milk and butter”—would be the last to lay claim to gentility.

It was a little disappointing to be compelled to abandon his dream of a Confederate colonel and of a decayed “first family.”

“But the little girl is perfectly charming,” he mused, and strode up the road humming:

“Oh, she smashed all the hearts
Of the swains in them parts,
Did Mistress Biddy O’Toole.”

The directions given him by the station-master at Sandywood Station had been so clear that,

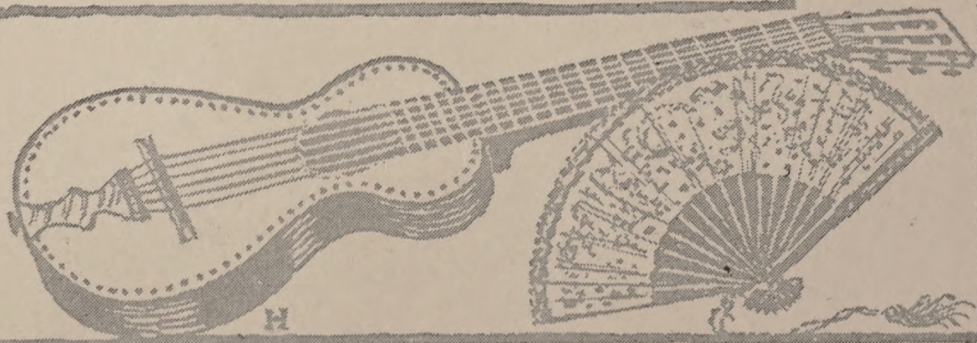
although a stranger to this part of the country, Fessenden had found his way thus far easily enough.

Now, as he topped the rise, his eyes fell at once upon Sandywood House: a buff-and-white structure, with the pillared expansiveness of a true colonial mansion. It was set upon a knoll, across an interval, the wide expanse of the Chesapeake shimmering in front of it. Ardent Marylanders had been known to maintain that it was fully the equal of Mount Vernon itself.

The avenue leading up toward the back of the house from the main road wound a couple of hundred yards through a garden of box and lilac, then swept the pedestrian about an ell to the steps of a demilune porch, and almost vis-à-vis with half a dozen men and women drinking tea.

A plump, neutral-tinted woman, a trifle over-gowned, hurried forward to greet him.

"Why, Tom Fessenden!" she exclaimed. "So here you are at last! You bad man, you didn't come on the right train. Your things arrived this morning, but when the car came back from the station without you, I thought you'd backed out. The next thing I was expecting was a letter from you, saying you couldn't come at all, you irresponsible man!"



"I *would* have been a loser."

"Ve-ry pretty. Really, though, we *have* a jolly crowd here. All complete except for Roland Cary. If Roland Cary hadn't notions!"

"Is any man foolish enough to decline an invitation from you?"

"Any man? Oh, Roland Cary's a cousin."


"Lucky man! Madam, may I ask if he is so attractive that you wish he had come instead of me?"

"I wanted—wanted him to be here with you, silly. He—he is perfectly charming. You know, I'm half afraid of *you*. You're such a superior old Yankee that I dare say you despise us Marylanders, and were as late in getting here as you *dared* to be." The perennial challenge of the Southern belle was in her tones.

Fessenden laughed. "I ran across Danton in Baltimore. Blame it all on him."

"Charlie Danton? Oh, isn't he most exasperating! Now, come up and meet everybody. Boys and girls, this is Mr. Fessenden—Mrs. Randall and Dick Randall, over there. And Pinckney—Pinck, do get out of that chair long enough to be polite!—my lord and master, Tom. That's my cousin, May Belle—May Belle Cresap—and Harry Cleborne; and *this* is Miss Yarnall, the





celebrated Miss Madge Yarnell; and—and that's all. How funny! I do believe I'm the only one of us you've ever met before."


"That proves how benighted I've been," he returned. "But what can you expect of a man who's never been on the Eastern Shore?"

Detecting something proprietary in the manner of the young man who hung over the back of Miss May Belle Cresap's chair, he abandoned his thought of taking a seat next that languid lady, and instead inserted himself deftly between Pinckney Cresap and Miss Madge Yarnell.

Cresap shook hands heartily. "Glad to see you, Fessenden. I've heard a lot of you from Polly ever since she knew you in New York—before she did me the honor to marry me. Glad you've got down to see us on our native heath at last." He poked a rather shaky finger at the stranded mint-leaf in the empty glass before him. "A julep? No? You mentioned Charlie Danton just now. You've heard about his high doings, I suppose. Perhaps you're in his confidence?"

"Not at all. He's in mine, to the extent of persuading me to buy a small yacht of his this morning—sight unseen. He promised to telegraph over this way somewhere and have it sent around to your boat-landing—if you'll allow me."





"Of course. My man will take care of it when it turns up. Danton's a queer one." He rattled his empty glass suggestively at his wife.

"He seemed as cynical as ever," commented Fessenden.

"He ought to be. They say that if it were 'befo' de wah' he'd have to meet a certain Baltimore man on the field of honor—a married man, you understand. Coffee and pistols for two!"

Fessenden was willing to elude the foreshadowed gossip. "We're shocking Miss Yarnell, I'm afraid."


The girl was, indeed, sitting with averted head, her face set rather sternly.

"Eh! Oh, I beg your pardon, Madge," said Cresap, with real concern.

"I hardly heard what you were saying," she rejoined. "I was thinking of something else."

Her voice was unusually deep and mellow, and Fessenden's sensitive ear thrilled pleasurably. He glanced toward her.

She was a decided brunette. Her eyes as they met his had a certain defiant challenge, a challenge at once bold and baffling. The distance between her eyes was a trifle too great for perfect beauty, but her complexion was transparently pale, and



her teeth were wonderfully white and even. The poise of her head was almost regal, and she had a trick of coming very close to one as she talked, that was very disconcerting.

On the whole, Miss Yarnell was a charming person of twenty-three or four, and he began to have a decided appreciation of the adjective Polly Cresap had applied to her. Moreover, the sombre challenge in her dark eyes impelled him to further investigation, under the clatter of tea-cups and small talk about them.

“Why ‘celebrated,’ Miss Yarnell?” he began. “Why ‘celebrated’ rather than ‘beautiful’ or ‘stunning’ or downright ‘handsome’?”

“Polly’s rather silly,” said Miss Yarnell.

“Are you dodging?”

“I never dodge. But Polly *is* silly—yes, she’s unkind, although she’d be in tears if she dreamed I thought so. She ought not to have called me *that*. No, I don’t dodge, but I suppose I can refuse to answer.”

He declined to notice the ungraciousness of her response. “Oh, of course, but I’m certain to learn the reason you’re ‘celebrated’ from some one—badly garbled, too,” he laughed.

Contrary to the spirit of his badinage, she seemed resolved to take him seriously. “That’s

true. I may as well tell you. I'm celebrated—'notorious' would be a better word—because of that affair in Baltimore last year. I was an idiot."

"Hard words for yourself. I think I don't understand."

"You don't know Baltimore, then?"

"Very little. The Club is about all, and that not more than once or twice a year."

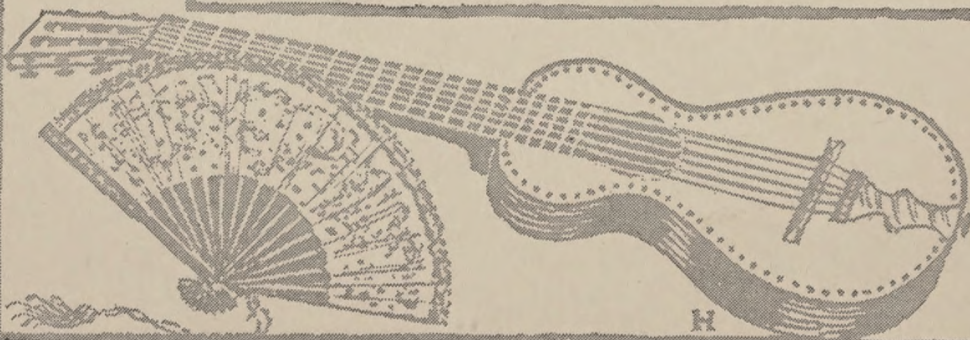
"The Club! If you've been there once this winter, I'm afraid you've heard of *me*. I'm Madge Yarnell, *the* Madge Yarnell, the girl who tore down the flag at the cotillion."


"O-oh!" He gave her a long stare. "It was *you*."

She winced before the contempt in his tone, and her eyes glistened suddenly. "I'm confessing to you," she reminded him with a humility that he knew instinctively was wholly unwonted. "I'm not proud of what I did, although some of my friends"—her glance swept over Polly Cresap—"are still foolish enough to tease me about it."

Compelled by his eyes and the light touch of his hand on her arm, she rose with him, and they sauntered together to the isolation of a pillar on the porch-edge.

The great bay, now purpling with the first





hint of sunset, stretched from the foot of the knoll to the hazy hills of the western shore. Little red glints flashed from the surface of the water and seemed to be reflected in the depths of Miss Yarnell's sombre eyes.

She stood with her hands behind her, her head turned a little from him, but held very proudly. A strong woman, evidently; a passionate one, perhaps; a devoted one, if the right man were found. Fessenden, studying her covertly, realized that for the second time that day he had encountered a girl who stirred in him an interest novel and delightful.


"Tell me about it, Miss Yarnell," he said at last. "I've only heard that you refused to enter the cotillion room so long as the Stars and Stripes decorated the doorway, and that finally you took down the flag with your own hands. I remember the *Evening Post* had a solemn editorial on the sinister significance of your alleged performance. It couldn't have been true—I realize that now that I know you. No one could accuse you—you of—that is——"

"Of vulgarity. Thank you for being too kind to say it. But I'm afraid most of it's true."

"I can't believe it."

She turned a grateful glance upon him. His





steady, reassuring smile seemed to give her a long-needed sense of comfort and protection. In spite of herself, her eyes fell before his, and her cheeks reddened a little.

"I'll tell you all about it," she said. "I did it on a dare. A year ago I was unbelievably silly—I've learned a great deal in a year. A man dared me—and I did it."

"I don't acquit you—quite; but what an egregious cad the man must have been!"

"No, no, don't think that. He never dreamed I would really dare. But I was determined to show him I wasn't afraid—wasn't afraid of anything—not even of him."

"Of him?"

"Yes."

"O-oh!" he said slowly. "I see. Well, *were* you afraid—afterward?"

She swung her hands from behind her back and struck them together with a sudden gesture of anger.

"No, but I hated him. I hate him! Not that he wasn't game. When I turned to him with that dear flag dangling in my hand, he swept me off in a two-step, flag and all. But he smiled. Oh, how he smiled!" She drew a long breath. "D—— his smile!" Her desperate little oath

was only pathetic. "I can see that triumphant twist about the corner of his mouth now, like a crooked scar."

"Good Lord! Charlie Danton!"

Her startled look confirmed the guess her words denied. "No, no."

"By Jove! don't I know that smile? We were in college together, you know, and I've made him put on the gloves with me more than once on account of that devilish smile. But I'll do him the justice to believe that he didn't really suppose you'd take that dare." He interrupted himself to laugh a little. "How seriously we're talking! After all, it's no great matter if a—a rather foolish girl did a rather foolish thing."

She refused to be enlivened. "I had it out with him," she said. "And since then we haven't seen anything of each other. You heard what Pinckney Cresap said just now?"


"About Danton and the possibility of a duel?"

"Yes. I'm afraid that's partly my fault. I sent him away, and——"

"I see. If he's weak enough to seek consolation in that way, he deserves to lose you."

She smiled frankly. "You're very, very comforting. I'm glad I confessed to you—it's done me good."





The clatter of the group at the tea-table behind them had effectually muffled the sound of their voices. Their eyes and thoughts, too, had been so preoccupied that it was only now they became aware of a small boy standing on the gravelled walk in front of them. He wore a checked shirt and patched trousers on his diminutive person, and freckles and a disgusted expression on his face.

"Gee Whilliken!" exclaimed this apparition, with startling vehemence. "I been standin' here 'most an hour, I bet, without you lookin' at me oncet. I'm Jimmy Jones."


"Welcome, scion of an illustrious family!" said Fessenden. "What is your pleasure?"

"Ah, g'wan," returned Master Jones. "I got a letter, that's what. I got a letter here for——" He broke off to scan his questioner closely. "You're the man, ain't you? Tall, good-looker, wet pants. Say, Mister, ain't your name Puddin' Tame?"

"'Puddin' Tame'?" asked Miss Yarnell, smiling. "Is it a game you want to play, kiddy?"

"No, ma'am, 'tain't a game. I want to see *him*. Say, ain't you Puddin' Tame?"

"I've been called so," admitted Fessenden, sur-



prised but greatly diverted. "But I'll let you into a secret, Jimmy: it's not my real name."

"Aw, who said it was? Don't I know it's a nickname? Guess I heard of Puddin' Tame before you was born."

"I believe your guess is incorrect, James."

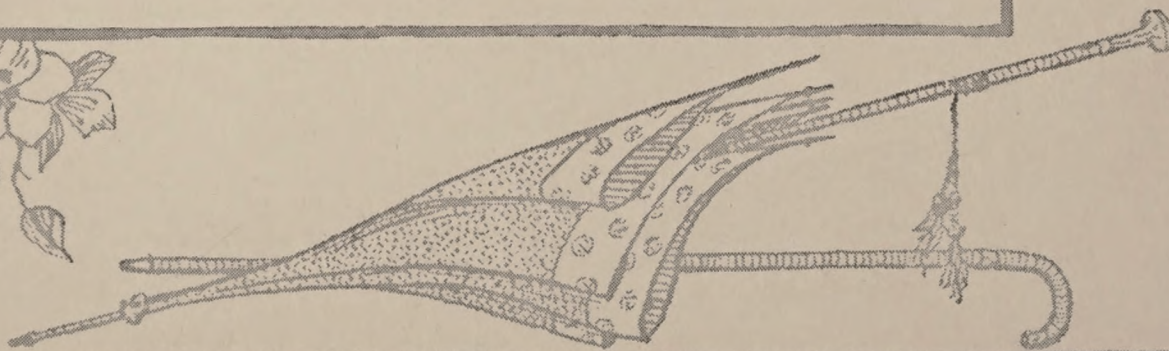
"No, 'tain't neither. Say, here's the letter for you. There ain't no answer." He thrust an envelope into Fessenden's fingers, and disappeared around the corner of the house with a derisive whoop.


The sound served to divert the tea-drinkers from their chatter.

"What! A *billet doux* already?" said Mrs. Dick Randall. "This *is* rushing matters, Mr. Fessenden. I think it's only fair you should let us know who she is." A chorus of exclamations followed, in which, however, Miss Yarnell did not join.

"Polly," said Cresap at last, "dont tease Fessenden. Rather, if your inferior half may venture the humble suggestion, I would urge a casual glance at his trousers. What do you see, Little Brighteyes?"

"Goodness, Tom! They're *wet*. Positively dripping!"





“I lost my way coming over, and had to wade through a brook.”

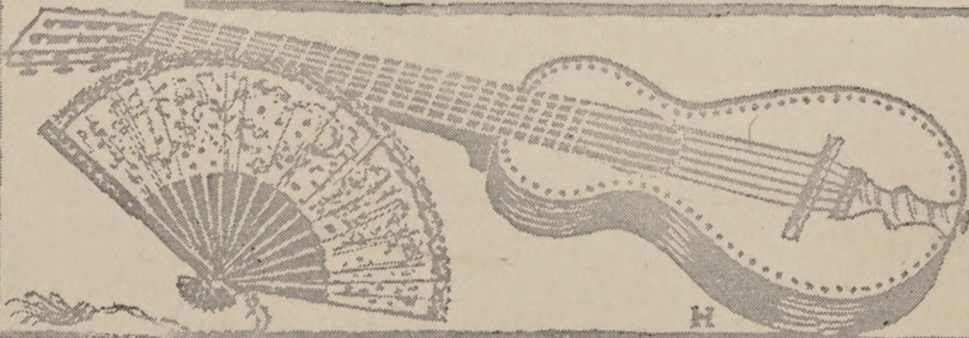
“And I never noticed it until now. And I declare I haven’t given you a chance to get to your room yet. Pinck, why *didn’t* you remind me? Ring the bell, please. Tom, you must change your things right away.”

Alone in his room, Fessenden read the note delivered by the cadet of the house of Jones.

DEAR MR. PUDDIN’ TAME:

Shall we have it for a secret that you’re coming to supper at our house to-morrow? We aren’t quality folk, and maybe Mrs. Cresap wouldn’t like it. So please don’t breathe it to a soul, but just steal away, and come.

BETTY.






III

BEFORE luncheon the next day, Fessenden had begun to acquire some acquaintance with the members of the Sandywood house-party—a particular acquaintance with the celebrated Miss Yarnell. It did not take him long to perceive that Miss Yarnell and he had been provided for each other's amusement. Harry Cleborne's fatuous devotion to May Belle Cresap—Fessenden rather disliked the two-part Christian name—and the good-natured cliquishness of the four married people, threw upon him the duty of entertaining the unattached bachelor girl. He took up the burden with extraordinary cheerfulness.

Pinckney Cresap watched his progress, frankly interested. Once, indeed, he took occasion to compliment him.

"You Northerners *have* some temperament, I see. If only Roland Cary were here, my boy!"

"He would have even more, I suppose," laughed Fessenden. "Polly told me about him yesterday."



“Eh? Oh, yes, so she was telling me. Oh, I’m not sure about the temperament—unfortunately, I haven’t had a chance to judge.” He chuckled. “But there’s a charm there, that’s certain.” He chuckled again, as if vastly amused at the recollection of some humor of Roland Cary’s. “An eligible *parti*,” he went on. “The head of *the* first family of Maryland. Father and mother both dead—brought up by a doting great-uncle.”

“Confound him! I’m quite jealous. Where is he? Doesn’t he dare show himself?”

“Off on some philanthropic scheme, I believe. Roland Cary has notions. But you needn’t be jealous—you’re doing very well with Madge Yarnell.”

Toward noon, as they were all debating whether or not a game of tennis was worth while, a trim-looking sloop rounded a wooded point of the bay shore, and ran down toward the boat-landing.

“I think that’s your yacht, Fessenden,” said Cresap. “If Danton has been keeping her up at the Polocoke River Club, she’d be just about due here now.”

“Let’s all go down and have a look at her.”

A hat or two had to be gotten, and by the time they reached the landing-stage the boat was

already tied up. A sunburned man touched his cap to the party.

"Mr. Charles Danton's *Will-o'-the-Wisp*," he said. "I was to deliver her at the Cary place, to Mr. Fessenden."

"I'm Mr. Fessenden. She looks like a good boat."

"There ain't any better of her class from Cape May to Hatteras," said the boatman. "It's a pity Mr. Danton's got the power-boat idea in his head."


"Yes, he told me that was one of the reasons he's giving up the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*. He's bought a hundred-ton steam-yacht, I believe."

"That's right, sir. Well, she's all right, and I'm to be master of her, so I guess I hadn't ought to complain, but, after all, a real sailer is better, I think, sir."

The boat was sloop-rigged, seaworthy rather than fast, and, for her length, very broad of beam and astonishingly roomy. Spars and deck were spick and span in new ash, and her sides glistened with white paint.


"Would you like to go over her?" suggested the boatman. "Here's the keys to everything, Mr. Fessenden—the rooms, and these are for the lockers and the water-tanks."





The party clambered aboard and proceeded to explore the little craft. The women exclaimed with surprise and delight.

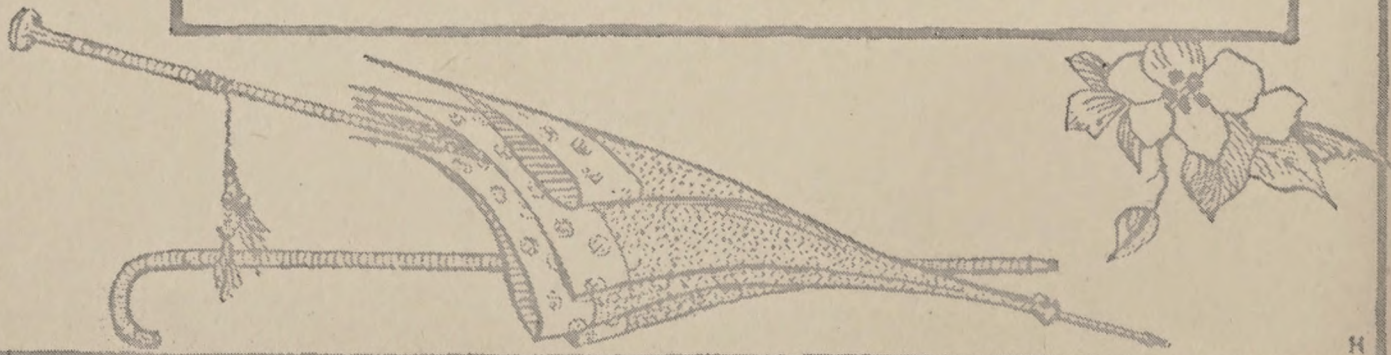

“Two cabins!” said Mrs. Dick Randall. “One at each end—do you see, Polly? And what’s this cunning cubby-hole between the rooms?”




“That’s the galley, ma’am,” answered the boatman. “The kitchen, you’d call it. Do you see that little oil-stove, there? Big enough to do what’s wanted plenty. Yes’m, she’s as well found as any old-time Baltimore clipper, she is. A cabin aft for the owner, and a fok’s’l room for me. Mr. Danton used to say he had a right to make me comfortable, if he wanted to. You know his queer ways, maybe. We kept the stores in those lockers. She’s got some of ’em aboard yet.”

“I should say so,” declared Polly, who had been rummaging about. “Potted tongue and jams, and a whole ham, and, I declare, here’s the sweetest little coffee-tin full of coffee!”

“Mr. Danton was thinkin’ of takin’ a cruise,” explained the boatman. “And when you bought the *Wisp*, sir, he telegraphed to turn her over right away, in case you wanted to use her while you was here. Well, gentlemen, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll be walkin’ over to the station to catch my





train back to Pcloccke." He touched his cap and tramped away up the knoll toward the road.

"Let's all go for a sail in her," said May Belle.

At the suggestion, an idea sprang full-grown into Fessenden's mind.

"Some other time," he returned. "I'd rather try her out by myself first. I want to see if she has any mean tricks before I risk any life besides my own. If the wind's right, I may tack about a bit this afternoon."

He realized that he had explained too elaborately—Miss Yarnell bent an intent look upon him. As he was returning up the pathway at her side—the others a safe distance ahead—she touched his arm.

"Please take me with you when you go sailing this afternoon?"

"Oh, I may not go. If I do, I think you'd better not. You see, the *Wisp* may be a crank."

"Nonsense! Besides, I'm a good sailor—swimmer too. I shouldn't care if we were capsized."

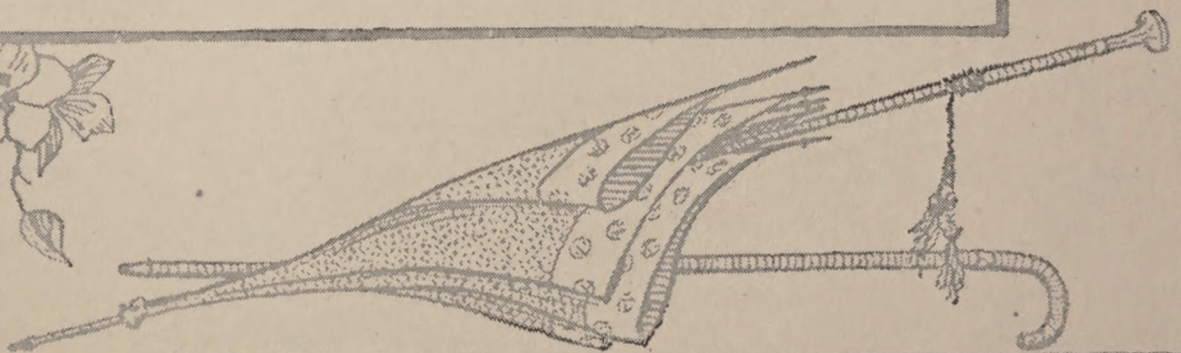
"I'd care for you."


"Please take me. I want particularly to go."

"Really, I can't."

"You mean you won't!"

"I'd rather not, at any rate."





Again her intent look surprised him. "Not if I bent 'on bended knee' to you?"

"Not if you begged me with bitter tears," he laughed.

"I thought you wouldn't, before I asked you," she said broodingly. "I knew it would be of no use."

"You did? Why do you want so much to go?"

"If I tell you that, will you tell me why you won't take me?"

"I can't promise. But what reason can there be except that I don't care to risk your life in a boat I know nothing about?"

"What solicitude!" she said with sarcasm. "'Men were deceivers ever.'"

She gave him an enigmatic smile as they took up their tennis rackets.

Beyond an amused wonder at the vagaries of the modern American—or, at any rate, Maryland—girl, this incident made little impression on Fessenden's mind, occupied as it was with schemes of its own. By the time luncheon had been over an hour or two, however, and it drew on to the time when he might be expected to take out the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, he confidently anticipated a renewal of Miss Yarnell's request.

He was downright disappointed, therefore,

when the young woman in question announced that she had a slight headache and thought a nap would do her good. Polly and Mrs. Dick chorused hearty approval, and Pinckney advised a julep.


Thus supported, Miss Yarnell mounted the staircase from the wide hallway, not vouchsafing a single glance at Fessenden, who lingered rather ostentatiously about in his yachting flannels. Although his determination—as whimsical as the girl who had inspired it—to keep his projected visit to White Cottage a secret forbade the presence of Madge Yarnell upon the *Wisp*, he would willingly have had another trial of wits with her. However, this was denied him.

Mrs. Dick and Polly made perfunctory petitions to accompany him, easily waved aside. Dick Randall himself and Cresap were too lazy even to offer their companionship. May Belle and her follower had taken themselves off an hour before. Thus Fessenden found nothing to hinder his announced plan of trying out the *Wisp* alone.

“I’m off,” he declared. “By the way, if I’m not back for dinner, don’t worry, and don’t wait dinner for me. The wind may fall and make it a drifting match against time, you know, so don’t think of delaying dinner, if I don’t turn up.”

Once on board the sloop, he cast off, hoisted





mainsail and jib, and stood away to the northward.

Although unfamiliar with the dry land of Maryland, Fessenden was not entirely so with its waters. Once or twice he had taken a cruise on the fickle Chesapeake, and he was fairly well acquainted with the character of the sailing and the configuration of the bay.

Moreover, he had given a half-hour's close study to some of Cresap's charts that morning. He knew, therefore, that his first long reach on the starboard tack would take him well clear of the land. Thence he planned to come about and sail with the wind to a little cove he had noticed on the map. This cove lay a mile or so above Sandywood, and was concealed therefrom by a heavily-wooded point. He counted upon making a landing there about six o'clock.

It was a delightful day for sailing. The breeze was firm, but not too strong—just brisk enough to ruffle the water with a steady purr under the bow as the sloop slid up into the wind.

In pure enjoyment Fessenden whistled shrilly and sang snatches of song. His trip had enough of mystery about it to arouse all the boy in him. The thought of his evasion of Miss Yarnell's importunity, too, made him laugh aloud. To be



sure, his merriment was a little diminished by his recollection that she had shown no desire to accompany him at the last. Was she merely whimsical, he wondered, or had she acted with a motive?

He hauled the mainsail a trifle tauter, and watched with critical eye the flattening of the canvas. The *Wisp* fairly sailed herself, and needed little attention. He burst into song:


“And bends the gallant mast, my boys,
While, like the eagle fre-e-e,
Away the good ship flies and leaves
Old England on her lee.”

He stopped. The wind pushed persistently at the flattening sail; the water purred under the bow; the shore was already hazy behind him. These things were as they ought to be, yet he had become conscious that something extraordinary had interrupted his flow of song.

His eyes, sweeping the whole horizon, came back to the sloop, surveyed her slowly from bowsprit to rudder-post, and rested finally on the closed double-doors of the little cabin that faced him across the cockpit.

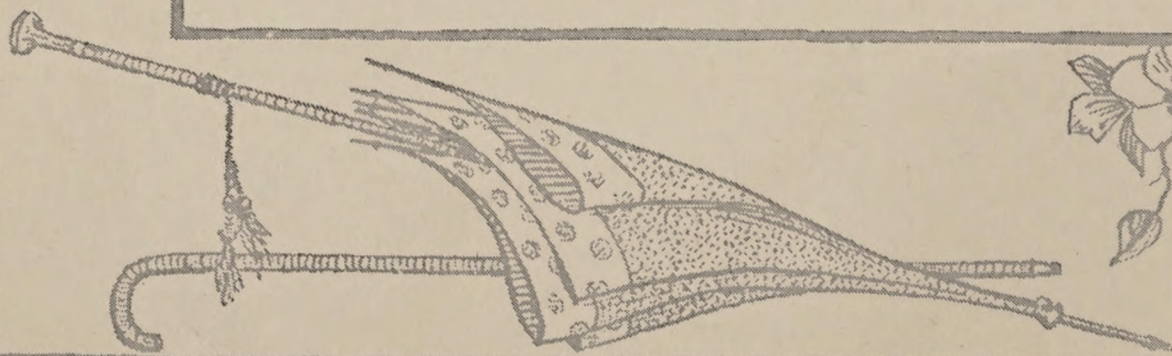
At that moment a loud knocking shook the latticed doors. Then a mellow voice spoke distinctly:





“ ‘Behind no prison grate,’ she said,
‘That slurs the sunshine half a mile,
Live captives so uncomforted
As souls behind a smile—
God’s pity let us pray,’ she said.”

The doors were flung open, and framed in the hatchway appeared the upper part of the body, the dark hair, the defiant eyes, and the faintly-smiling mouth of the celebrated Miss Madge Yarnell.





MISS YARNELL MOUNTED THE PAIR OF STEPS FROM THE CABIN



IV

FOR a moment Fessenden could only stare. Then he gave a long whistle.

"This Maryland climate is—extraordinary!" he remarked to the horizon.

Miss Yarnell mounted the pair of steps from the cabin to the level of the cockpit, and seated herself on the lockers.

"I simply had to come," she explained.

"Marvellous impulsion!"

"I'm not welcome, then?"

"I'm afraid you've guessed it."


"Obstinate—man!"

"Artful—woman!"

"You are a very chilly person. I think I'll begin to hate you pretty soon."

"Really!"

"Now that I'm here, you might as well make the best of it. Please, sir, I'll try to be very agreeable and entertaining, if you'll only be kind to me."



“You’d move a heart of stone, but mine’s a diamond. You’re always charming—I admit that freely—but I can’t consider that in this particular situation. No, no. ‘Off with your head; so much for Bolingbroke.’” He braced the wheel against his knee and began to haul in the sheet.

“You’re going back?”

“Yes.”

“To put me ashore?”

“Right, my lady.”

“Then you intend to sail off again to—to do what you like?”

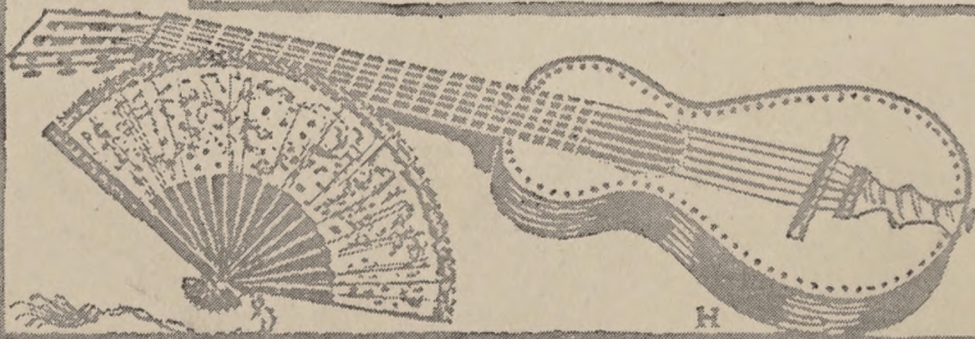
“Humanly speaking, yes.”

In spite of the heeling deck she rose abruptly, her eyes wide and resolute.

“Mr. Fessenden, I’m going with you this afternoon, wherever you go. If you take me back to the landing, I won’t go on shore. You’ll have to use force, and I warn you I’ll resist, and I’m strong for a woman. I solemnly vow I’ll make a dreadful scene. And I’ll scream, and I can scream *hideously!*”

Her words were utterly convincing. He let go the sheet and stared. “By Jove! you *are* a terror. What in the world is all this about?”

“Never mind.”



"But you make me mind. Surely all this can't be a mere freak on your part. Or is it a joke?"

"No. I've a reason for my—my very unlady-like conduct."

"Strike out the adjective. But what's the reason?"

"I'd rather not tell." She resumed her seat, as if she thought the victory won. Her eyes dwelt on the lines of his powerful figure, well set off by his gray flannels. "You are a distinctly good-looking man, but obstinate."

"And you're a remarkably lovely girl, but eccentric; very—eccentric."

"You don't know my reasons."

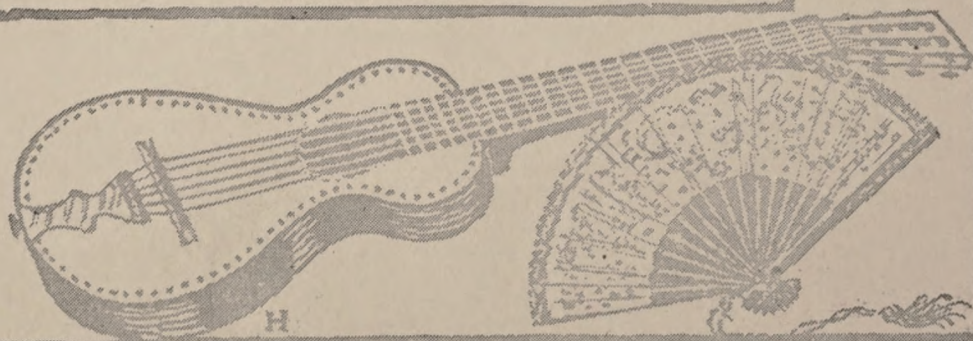
"I've asked for them."


She laughed evasively. "Isn't it about time to come about?" she said.

"It is. But how do you know that? Are you a witch?"

"In with the weather braces," she commanded. "Stand by to tack ship! Ready about! Helm's a-lee! Round we go, now. Make fast! All snug, sir."

Accompanying her rather uncertain display of nautical language with a pull at the sheets that proved her strength, she gave Fessenden her assistance in bringing the *Wisp* before the wind.





Afterward there was silence between them for a long time. The knots slipped away under the keel of the little yacht, and she drew rapidly in toward land. Fessenden consulted his watch. It was half past five. He decided that it was time to land—time to send his unwelcome visitor away, and to keep his appointment with Betty for supper at White Cottage.

Miss Yarnell examined the little binnacle beside the wheel.

“Due east,” she said sombrely, “almost. If you go back to Sandywood, Mr. Fessenden, remember, I’ve given you fair warning.”


“Fear not, mademoiselle. Far be it from me to force you to try your screaming powers on me! I shudder at the thought. No, no. Do you see that cape two or three points south of east? Piney Point, it’s called. That’s the place I’m aiming for. Are you content?”

“Perfectly content.”

She met his puzzled frown with a faint smile. “You beat the Dutch,” he declared in an injured tone.

It was just six o’clock when the *Wisp* grounded gently on the sandy beach of Piney Cove. The westering sun flung red bands across the pine woods, here growing almost to the water’s edge.





Fessenden led a line ashore and made it fast to a convenient tree. "Now, Miss Yarnell," he smiled, "the voyage is over. I'll really have to ask you to leave me—with my thanks for a delightful afternoon, after all. If you follow the bay shore, you'll be at Sandywood in half an hour, I fancy."

She had joined him as he stood on the beach. "Thank you," she said gravely, "but I'm going with you."

"Really, this is rather—rather——"

"Impossible," she supplied. "Yes, I'll agree to anything you like to say of me, but, Mr. Fessenden, it's very important for me to go with you—to your appointment."


He stared, bewildered not only by her audacity, but by her apparent knowledge of his plans.

"Do you deny that you have an appointment with some one near here?" she demanded.

"I don't deny it. But what if I have? This is too ridiculous! I don't know how you know where I'm bound, but—I don't want to be rude, Miss Yarnell—but even if you do know, I don't see how it matters to you."

"It does matter to me," she said, sudden passion in her voice. "It matters terribly."





Her suppressed excitement, her entire seriousness, could no longer be doubted.

"I don't understand," he said. "I think you must be making some mistake."

"No, no. I don't know exactly where you're going, I admit, but I know who it is you're going to see."

He felt a baffling sense of amazement over an impossible situation. "Who is it, then?" he demanded.

"Please, *please* don't let us mention names. But I know. Mr. Fessenden, I recognized the envelope that boy brought up yesterday."

"The envelope? O-oh! You did?"


"Yes. I've seen that style of envelope too often not to know it. Now do you understand why I want to go with you?—why I *must* go?"

"I'm as much at sea as ever. Why?"

She flushed vividly. "If you really can't guess, I—I can't tell you."

He stared at her helplessly, then tossed both hands in a gesture of despair. "I give it up. I give *you* up, in fact. You fairly make my head spin! It's getting late, Miss Yarnell. I think you'll find a path behind the grove."

"I'm not going to Sandywood."



“Then I’ll leave you in possession of the yacht. Good-night.”

He took off his cap smilingly, and, turning, walked rapidly inland. He had not gone half a dozen yards when he heard a light footstep behind him, and wheeled to find her at his very heels.

“I’m going with you.”

“You’ll dog me across country?” he asked incredulously.

She flushed painfully, but stood her ground. “I’m going with you,” she repeated.

“Oh, Lord!” he groaned. For a moment he eyed her rather malevolently. “Come back to the sloop, then. We’ll talk it over.”

She followed obediently as he clambered over the low rail of the *Wisp*.

“I don’t know what to make of you,” he complained.

“I hardly know what to make of myself.”

“If I had more time, I might be able to get at things.”

“You’d better simply take me with you.”

“Hum-m,” he said contemplatively.

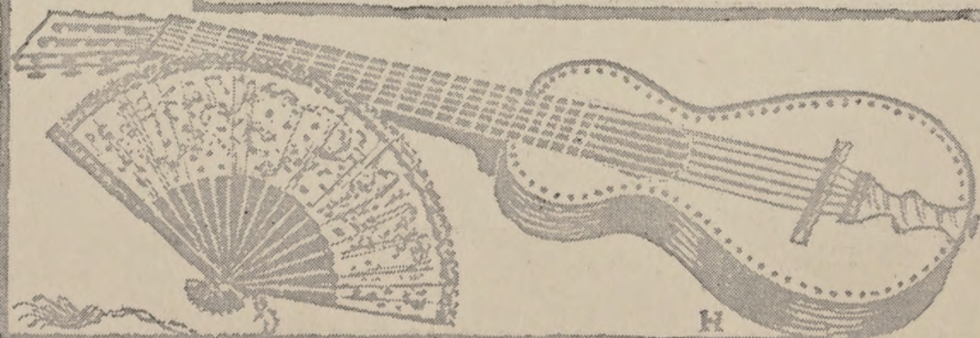
They were standing side by side on the floor of the cockpit. He waved his hand toward the bay. “All this beautiful scenery ought to be good for your malady—whatever that may be. Look at

that sunset, Miss Yarnell. Why, hello! What's that? Dead into the sun! Can't you see it?"

She peered beneath the arch of her hand to mark the point. At that moment her elbows were gripped as if by a giant. She felt herself lifted, then thrust firmly, although gently, downward into the little cabin.

It was all done in an instant. Fessenden slammed the double-doors deftly upon his prisoner and dropped the catch into the slot.

"Good-night," he called reassuringly. He leaped ashore and hurried inland.





V


FESSENDEN was well aware that the frail catch that held the doors of the *Wisp's* cabin would not long hold prisoner so vigorous a young woman as Madge Yarnell. He guessed that in ten minutes she would be wending her disconsolate way toward Sandywood. But ten minutes would be enough—he gave himself no further concern about her.

He followed a cow-path beyond the pine grove, crossed a meadow or two, and struck the road not far above White Cottage.

A quail called in a field of early wheat, and was answered from a thicket of elderberry near at hand—a charmingly intimate colloquy. Fessenden was serenely conscious that it was good to be only twenty-eight, and on his way to dine, or sup, with an artless girl.

In ten minutes he was halting at the gate of White Cottage. Although it was only the dusk of the day, the window shades were down, and





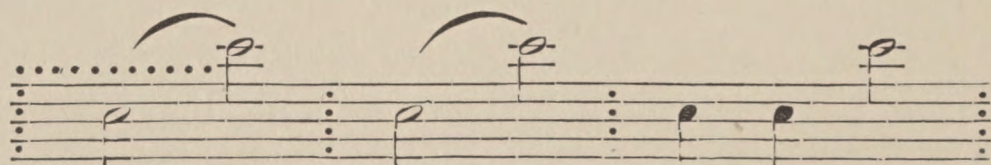
the lighted lamps within sent a glow across the wide porch. The door stood invitingly open.

As he clicked the gate behind him, he felt as if he were about to enter another world than the one he had left at Sandywood—the enchanted world of boyhood.

At the thought, he pursed his lips and sent the rounded notes of the quail through the evening haze.

He had not time to repeat them before a slender figure, appearing as if by magic, extended him a warm little hand.

“Bob White!” she said gaily. “I’m very glad to see you. I was in the hammock under the hickory there. That gives me a new name for you—I was tired of Puddin’ Tame.” Her lips echoed the whistle.



“I’m glad you’ve come, Mr. Bob White.”

“Did you dream for a moment I wouldn’t?”

“I was a little afraid you might forget your promise. No, what I was really afraid of was that you wouldn’t find a chance to steal away. You *did* steal away, didn’t you, ve-ry quietly?”



"I did. I sailed away, at any rate, and I didn't tell a soul where I was bound."

"I knew you were a reliable man."

"How is the sprained ankle? You don't seem to be noticeably crippled."

"Of course not. That's all well now—I've been resting in the hammock all day. But come into the house. Supper is ready, and Aunt Landis has the most delicious chocolate, with whipped cream."

She tripped ahead of him up the pathway and into the house, calling: "Aunt Landis! Uncle Landis! Here he is. Here's Mr. Bob White. He's ready for supper, I'm sure."

The long-suffering good wife met him in the living-room. "Good-evening, Mr.—ah——"

"My name is——"


"Bob White," interrupted the girl. "Please let it be Bob White. That *must* be your name. Don't you like it?"

"Very much."

"Then that's what we'll call him, please, Aunt Landis. Yesterday you were Puddin' Tame, to-day you're Bob White, and all the time you're really somebody else. I'll have the fun of meeting a new man any moment I like."


Mrs. Landis received this remark with a look





as nearly approaching to sternness as she was capable of. "Betty, you must behave. Remember, you ain't as much of a baby as the gentleman maybe takes you for."

The girl fell silent, and seated herself upon a chintz-covered sofa. Fessenden scanned her more closely than the dusk outside had permitted him to do.




Her hair was gathered in a shining braid that hung quite to her waist, a girlish and charming fashion. Her blue eyes watched him demurely from beneath a broad, low forehead. The sailor suit of yesterday had given place to a simple white frock—Fessenden noticed that it came fairly to her ankles, now discreetly slipped and stockinged.

At the moment of seating themselves at table, they were joined by Uncle Landis, a middle-aged farmer whose preternaturally-shining face and plastered hair, not to mention a silence unbroken throughout the meal, gave plain proof of recent rigorous social instruction on the part of his helpmeet.

The memory of that supper has always been a delight to Fessenden. The omelet was all golden foam; the puffed potatoes a white-and-brown cloud. The spiced cantaloupe and brandied





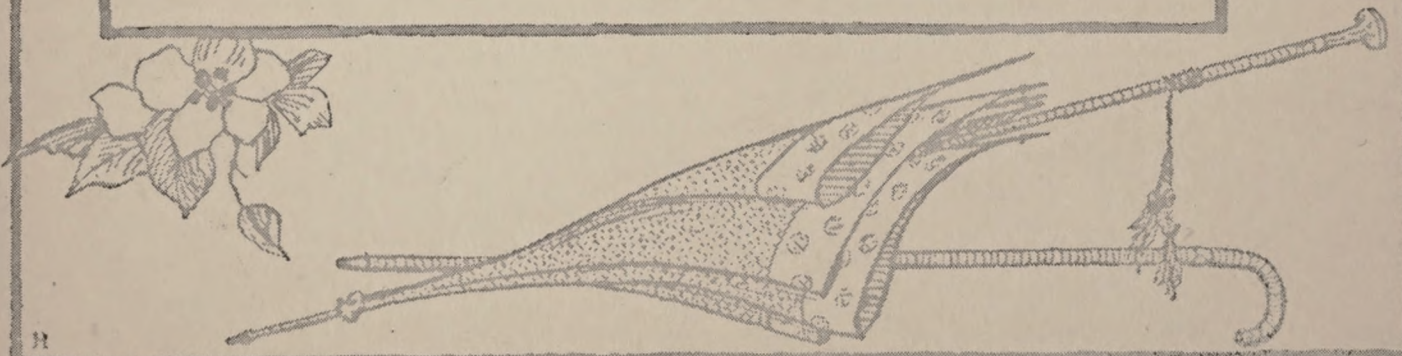
peaches reminded him of the wonderful concoctions his Grandmother Winthrop had made—she who would never allow any one but herself to wash the glass and silver.

The hot Maryland beaten biscuits were crusty to the smoking hearts of them, withstanding his teeth's assault just long enough to make their crumbling to fragments the more delicious. The chocolate, in blue china cups not too small, was served as the Spaniards serve it and as it ought to be served—of the consistency of molasses candy when poured into the pan.

And then came the creamy rice pudding for dessert, whereupon Fessenden won Mrs. Landis forever by asking for the receipt and gravely jotting it down in his notebook, in spite of Betty's laughing eyes.

Betty's talk flashed and sparkled to his sallies. She showed a self-possession remarkable in a farmer's daughter who was encountering a man of the world for what must have been the first time in her life, as he fancied. Once or twice he felt that she had led him on to talk of himself and to expand his own ideas to a degree unusual in him.

"Betty, you're a witch," he declared at last. "I've been clattering away here like a watchman's



rattle. You can't be interested in all this stuff about my cart-tail speeches for honest city government."

"But I am interested, decidedly. I like to hear about men that do something—they're a novelty." Her frank smile warmed him. "I know there are enough worthless men in the world to make the useful ones count all the more. 'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.' That's as true in Maryland as anywhere."

"You're a worldly-wise small person."

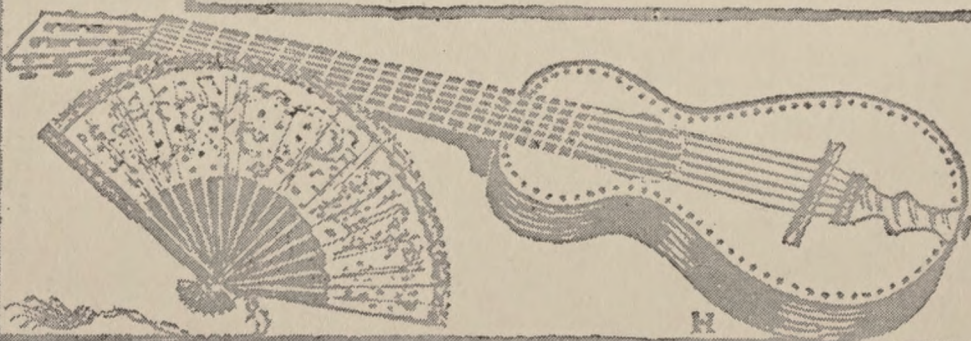
"Oh, I read and think a little, Mr. Bob White." She nodded her head at him until the blonde braid danced.

After supper Uncle Landis abruptly vanished. Auntie Landis lingered in the dining-room on the plea of clearing off the supper things—in point of fact, Fessenden saw her no more that night. Betty led the way to a couple of steamer-chairs at a corner of the porch.

The breeze had freshened a little, and he tucked her knitted scarf about her shoulders with a care not altogether fatherly.

"Thank you, Bob White. You're very kind."

"Who wouldn't be kind to you, Betty? Look there! Over the top of the hill. Even the stars are peeping out to see if you're comfortable."



She gave her little crowing laugh. "What a poet! I always think of Emerson's verse about the stars. Do you remember it?"

"Over our heads are the maple buds,
And over the maple buds is the moon;
And over the moon are the starry studs
That drop from the angel's shoon."

"Where did you learn Emerson?"

"I had a teacher who liked him."

"Did any one ever tell you that you talk as a prima donna ought to talk, but never does—
'soft, gentle, and low'?"

"Is that a compliment?"

"Certainly. Perhaps you sing."

"I'll get my guitar."

She flashed into the house and back again. The starlight enabled him to see her indistinctly as she tightened the keys of a small guitar.

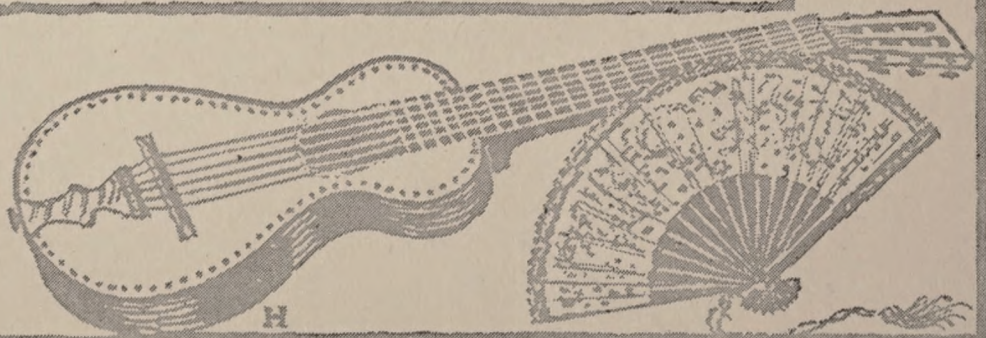
"I like this song," she explained. "It was written by Fessenden, you know."


"By whom?"

"Thomas Fessenden, *the* Fessenden, the man who——"

"Oh, of course."

To hear himself thus referred to, to hear one of his own casual songs launched from the lips of a country girl in the splendor of a Maryland





night, was a novel experience even for Fessenden. He realized with amusement that his identity was wholly unknown to Betty, that capricious young person not having allowed him as yet to mention his own name.

She sang, her eyes laughing upon him as her lips rounded to the whistle of the quail in the refrain.

“At morn when first the rosy gleam
Of rising sun proclaimed the day,
There reached me, through my last sweet dream,
This oft-repeated lay:

(Too sweet for cry,
Too brief for song,
’Twas borne along
The reddening sky)

Bob White!

Daylight, Bob White!

Daylight!”

“At eve, when first the fading glow
Of setting sun foretold the night,
The tender call came, soft and low,
Across the dying light:

(Too sweet for cry,
Too brief for song,
’Twas but a long
Contented sigh)

Bob White!

Good-night, Bob White!

Good-night!”

Fessenden applauded softly, and his young hostess smiled appreciation.

"Tell me about yourself, Bob White," she said. "Are you 'tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor'?"

"Betty, perhaps *you* can tell *me* something. I got away to you without letting any one at Sandywood know, by going for a sail in my sloop."

"A ve-ry good idea."

"Don't be too sure. After I'd gotten well off, one of the house-party—a girl—coolly appeared from the cabin. She'd been bound to come with me, you see."

"Why?"

"That's the problem. She was very mysterious, and persistent, no name! When we landed in Piney Cove, she insisted upon following me."


"Goodness me!"

"We had the most extraordinary time—I fastened her in the cabin by main force. I don't understand it at all. She said she knew I was coming to meet you, and seemed very much wrought up about it. Hold on! She didn't mention your name, but she said she knew who it was I had my appointment with."

"How could she guess?"

"We happened to be standing together when





your little friend, Jimmy Jones, brought your note. She said this afternoon that she recognized the style of the envelope."

Betty's guitar slipped from her lap to the floor. "Bob White, Bob White!" she exclaimed. "What's her name?"

"Didn't I say? She's a Miss Yarnell—Miss Madge Yarnell, from Baltimore. Do you know anything about her?"

The girl stooped to rescue the guitar. Her warm cheek touched his as he, too, groped for it, and both recoiled a little consciously—Fessenden in amusement at his own confusion.


"Do you know about Miss Yarnell?" he repeated.

"I've heard her name. A girl—the woman who gave me that song—knows who she is. Isn't she the girl who tore down the flag?"

"Yes, that's the one. Can you imagine why she pursued me so? Do you suppose she really recognized your writing paper? And even if she did, what is it to her?"

She twanged a careless chord or two. "Oh, perhaps she was vexed because you didn't stay at the house-party," she suggested; "because you preferred White Cottage to Sandywood."

After a while he struck a match and looked at



his watch. "Nine o'clock. I must be going. If I stay much longer, the Cresaps will be sending out their launch to tow me home. You know, I'm supposed to be becalmed out in the bay. I hate to go. I've had a bully time."

"Really?"

"Perfect. Betty, look here! I'm staying at Sandywood only until Tuesday, and to-day's Friday. H-i-n-t!"

She rose and made him an adorable curtsy. "Bob White, Esquire, I respectfully invite you to come to my picnic to-morrow."

"Will there be a picnic, really?"

"Yes—for you and me."

"Great! I'll come, and humbly thank you."

"Then you must be at the foot of the lane by the brook at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. And it's another secret, remember. Do you think you can get away?"

"I *will* get away. Perhaps I can invent a business letter that will call me to Baltimore."

She clapped her hands. "Oh, I'll attend to that. You know Jimmy Jones is really the Sandywood Station telegraph boy, and he'll do anything for me."

"I don't doubt it. There's at least one other person in the same happy condition."

“Haven’t you a friend in Baltimore who might possibly send you a telegram—somebody so real you could just show it to the Cresaps, and they’d believe it? What fun!”

He chuckled. “This is a real conspiracy. The only friend the Cresaps and I have in common is Danton.”

“Who?”

“Charles Danton. D-a-n-t-o-n.”

“I’ll remember.”

“All right. At ten o’clock to-morrow, at the foot of the lane. You’ll meet me there, honest Injun, Betty?”

“Honest Injun! Hope I may die!”

She had followed him to the edge of the porch and stood looking down at him as he lingered a couple of steps below.

“Good-night, Betty.”

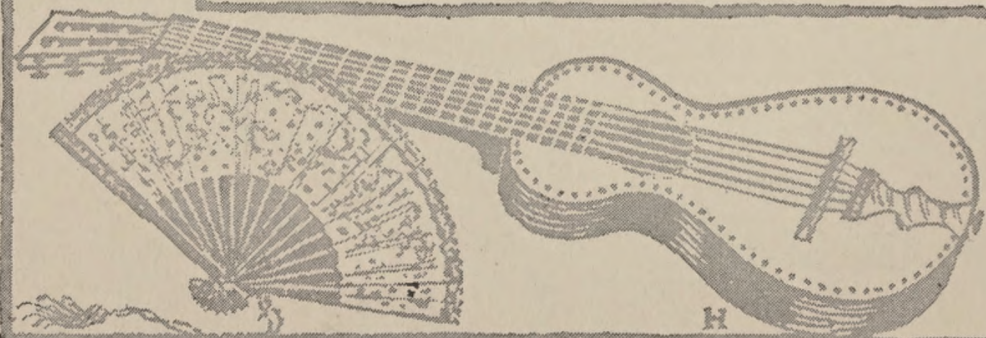
Her hand slipped into his outstretched palm. “Good-night, Bob White.”

“I’ve had a lovely time.”

“So have I.”

He had not released her hand, and now she leaned toward him until the great braid of her hair fell across her breast.

“Bob White, I’m rather sorry I was so—so



violent yesterday, when you were carrying me and—and did what you did.”

She was so close to him that he felt her hair brush his forehead. The blood was pounding in his ears, and his throat was parched. He lifted his left hand slowly to her neck to draw her lips to his. Then, all at once, he steadied himself.

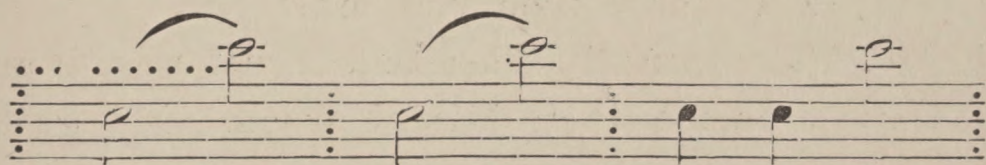
“Oh, you little witch!” he said. “I swear I don’t know whether you’re an innocent or a demon. No, no, Betty! The next time I kiss you, you must ask me outright, not merely *look* at me! Do you ask me?”

She snatched her hand away. “Certainly not. Never!”

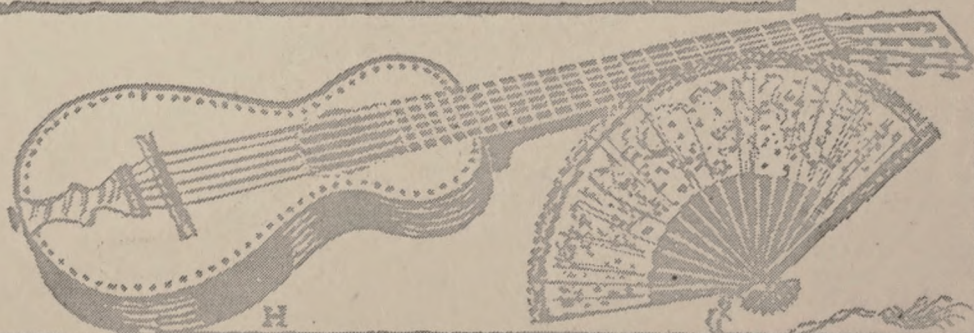
“Good-night, then.”

“Good-night, Bob White.”

She stood motionless until he was lost in the darkness, then whistled softly:



She waited until the call was answered from the slope of the hill; then, laughing rather wistfully, she sought Aunty Landis.





VI

FESSENDEN joined the others at Sandywood while they were still lingering over coffee in the library. His belated appearance, casual and unconcerned as he endeavored to make it seem, was greeted with a storm of badinage.

"Oh, my prophetic soul! You were becalmed sure enough."

"Does the poor boy want a bite to eat?"

"We were just organizing a relief expedition for you, old man."

"What a lonely time you must have had of it, Mr. Fessenden!" This last thrust was from no less a person than Miss Yarnell. He gave her a broad smile in return.

He allowed the others to believe what they would, explaining only that he had been compelled to leave the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* in Piney Cove. Cresap promised to send his man up to bring her back to the landing-stage.



"I'M AFRAID YOU'LL FIND THE CABIN-DOOR CATCH IS BROKEN,"
SAID MADGE YARNELL IN AN UNDERTONE

"I'm afraid you'll find the cabin-door catch is broken," said Madge Yarnell in an undertone, as she halted near Fessenden on her way to bed.

"If I hadn't been sure you'd smashed through easily enough, I should have come back to the sloop and sailed away with you."

"With me?"

"Certainly—made you captive like an old buccaneer. Willy-nilly, I should have clapped you under hatches, and sailed for the Spanish Main."

Her brooding eyes dwelt long upon him. "That's very interesting." She struck her hands softly together. "It's worth thinking about. Thank you for the suggestion, Mr. Fessenden."

"I'm not sure I understand."

"Of course you don't. You're only a man."

In the morning, although he was not down for breakfast until nine o'clock, he was ahead of any of the others. One of the servants handed him a telegram. He read it with amusement over Betty's cleverness.

THOMAS FESSENDEN,


Sandywood, Polocoke County, Maryland.

Meet me Club one o'clock. Important personal matter. Want your advice. Don't fail me.

CHARLES DANTON.


He requested the butler to turn over the telegram to Mr. and Mrs. Cresap, and to explain





to them that he would be back at Sandywood before dinner. On the plea that he vastly preferred a walk, he managed to evade the man's suggestion that the car be brought round to take him to Sandywood Station.

Precisely at ten o'clock he was cooling his heels on the stone wall at the foot of the lane.




In that shaded hollow the sun had not yet pierced to dry the dew from the wild myrtle. Now and then the clambering creepers rustled where a field-mouse ran shyly through them. An oriole flashed from a sycamore, like an orange tossed deftly skyward. Spring was a living presence—Fessenden was stirred by its exuberance as he had not been these ten years.

By and by a rattle of wheels came to his ears. Presently a serene gray mare hove in sight, escorting, rather than pulling, a low-swung landau with an ancient calash-top. So capacious was the hood that at first he could descry no one in its depths. Then the mare came to a condescending halt, and a laughing face leaned into view.

“Good-morning, Patience-on-a-Monument.”

“Good-morning, Grief. Grief, that's the fluffiest hat I ever saw.”

“Have you been waiting long?”



“Hours and hours.”

“Then, come, get in. We’re going driving ‘over the hills and far away.’”

She clucked to her steed, and the old mare, disdainfully obedient, conveyed them straight through the brook—the water rising to the hub—and up the windings of a wood-road beyond.

“The first thing a man wants to know on a picnic,” affirmed Betty sagely, “is whether or not there’s enough to eat. There isn’t, but there will be.”

“I rest content. Betty, who taught you to dress like that?”

“Do you like me—my clothes, I mean?”

“I like both, profoundly.”

She was all in white—fluffy hat, linen shirt-waist, duck skirt, and low shoes. Her hair was done into some sort of knot on her neck—Fessenden was rather weak at deciphering a girl’s coiffure. Her eyes shone wonderfully clear, and her smiles were frequent but uncertain, as if she bubbled with jokes too ethereal to share even with him.

“Betty,” he said, “do you mind my remarking that you look adorable to-day?”

“Only to-day?”

"Always, you witch! Betty, don't tell me that any mere district school made half of *you*."

"Why not?"

"Well, it sounds a bit impertinent of me, but your voice—your talk—your dress! And, above all, you have the air—ah——"

"Of a lady, Mr. Critic?"

"Exactly. One doesn't expect to find *l'air distingué* in a farmer's daughter."

"A farmer's niece."

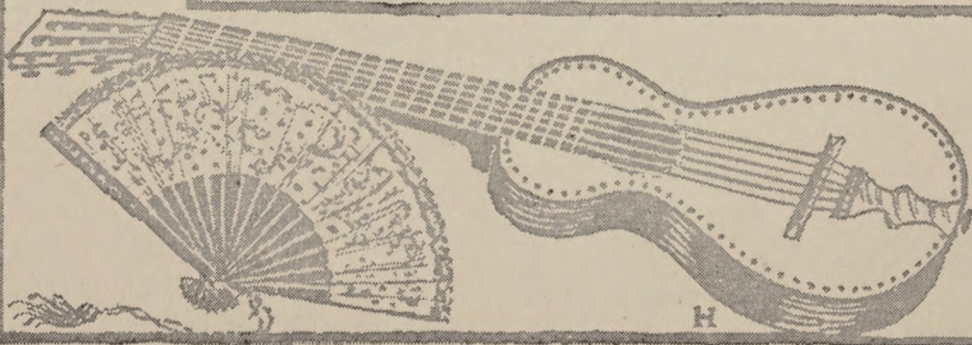
"Of course. Perhaps that makes all the difference. Do you mind my asking who your mother was, Betty?"

"My mother was related to the first families of Maryland."

He could hardly forbear a smile at the pride manifest in her tone. "I see. She has a right to be proud of her daughter."

"Really? Bob White, that's the very nicest thing you could say to me if you'd tried a hundred years. Mother died when I was quite a little girl."

Fessenden was silent. For a while, the girl guided the gray mare from wood-road to rambling lane, from lane to turnpike, and from turnpike back to lane. As they rounded a low hill, Fes-



senden felt the salt breath of the bay upon his face.

"Where are we bound?" he asked.

"To Jim George's. It's a sort of inn—a very rustic inn. He cooks delicious things. People come here for dinners from as far as Baltimore, but I think it's too early in the season yet for anybody to be here but us."

"I hope so with all my heart."

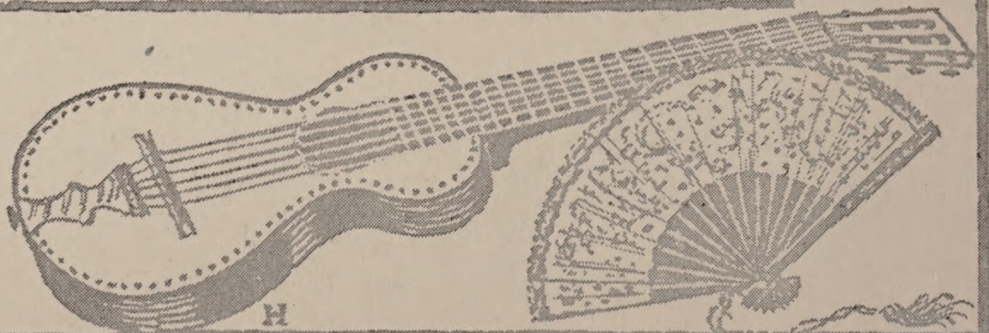
They ascended a sandy track through a little forest of pine, and emerged upon an open space. At the foot of a bluff the bay stretched to the horizon. On the forest side stood a log-cabin, amplified on all sides by a veranda of unbarked pine.

From this structure promptly hobbled a white-haired darky.

"Mawnin', lady. Mawnin', gemman, sah. A day o' glory fo' the time o' year. Yas, sah, yas, ma'am, a real day o' glory. Won't you 'light down, ma'am?"

"Of course we will, Jim George, and we want some of your best shad."

"Ah d'clar to gracious! Is that yo'all, Miss Betty? Good Lan'! it's been a coon's age since I seen yo' purty face round hyah. It does me proud to see a——"



“Shad and corn-pone, Jim George,” she interrupted. “I want you to show this gentleman we can still cook in the South.”

“Ah’ll show him. Ah’ll show him, Miss Betty. Rufe! Rufe! Come hyah and take Miss Betty’s hoss.”

A boy led the mare away, and Fessenden and the girl established themselves in a hammock under a solitary oak at the bluff’s edge.

He drew a long breath of the salt air and smiled at his companion. “This is Paradise, and not even a serpent to mar it.”

In an incredibly short time Jim George appeared, bearing a tray piled high with eatables, and proceeded to spread the cloth on a table under the oak.

“Miss Betty,” he said, “and, gemman, sah, there’s a shad-roë as *is* a shad-roë. Jes’ yo’ eat it with all the buttah yo’ kin spread on it. This hyah co’n-pone needs a *spoon* for it. Them baked ’taters growed theirselves right hyah in the patch behint the house. They’s as sweet as honey. And hyah’s some milk. Yo’ ’member Jersey Molly, Miss Betty? Yas’m, this is *her* milk. None o’ yo’ *pastorilized* stuff neither—this is jes’ plain *milk*.”

“Betty,” said Fessenden, when Jim George had





"BETTY, ALLOW ME TO DRINK YOUR HEALTH IN JERSEY MOLLY WINE"

left them to themselves, "allow me to drink your health in Jersey Molly wine."

She touched her tumbler laughingly to his. "Skoal! Bob White, do you know it was only the day before yesterday you picked me out of the brook?"

"I was just thinking of that. At any rate, we're better acquainted than people ordinarily are in months."

"In three days?"

"Certainly," he maintained.

"You're a very funny man."

"I'm perfectly serious."

"I was wondering why you should care to come on a picnic with me. I'm only a country girl, after all, and you—you're different."

"I care to come because *you* are *you*, and that's plenty reason enough."

"Hum-m."

"Can you say as much?"

"I'm not sure."


"Cruel child!"

"I didn't say no—I only said I wasn't sure."

The afternoon slipped away, and at last they ordered their equipage for the homeward drive. Old Jim George bowed them off.

"Good-by, Miss Betty. Good-by, gemman,





sah. Ah hope yo' bofe come hyah agin right soon—yas, indeedy, and I hope yo' come togedder, too. Yah ha!" He screened his mouth behind his hand and added in a stage whisper: "Miss Betty, that's a mighty fine gemman yo's got, he is so, mighty fine."

They pursued the even tenor of their way homeward. The early butterflies flicked the gray mare's nose. Blackbirds pilfered a meal from the plowed fields beside the road. Once a thrush—to Betty's infinite delight—perched on the dashboard and sang a hasty trill.

"Spring is lovely," declared Betty.


"Lovely," agreed Fessenden with enthusiasm, and did not feel guilty of a commonplace.

Into the calm of their content came the clatter of distant hoofs.

"There's some one riding down that crossroad there," said Betty. "A woman. Is she waving at us, do you think?"

They peered out from the calash-top, and made out a horsewoman galloping down a side-path toward them. Her whip was going on her horse's flank, and now and then she brandished it as if to signal the two in the landau.

Betty pulled up. "Let's see what she wants." In another moment the horsewoman was near



enough to bring an exclamation of recognition from Fessenden. "Hello! I believe it's Miss Yarnell."

"Miss Yarnell?"

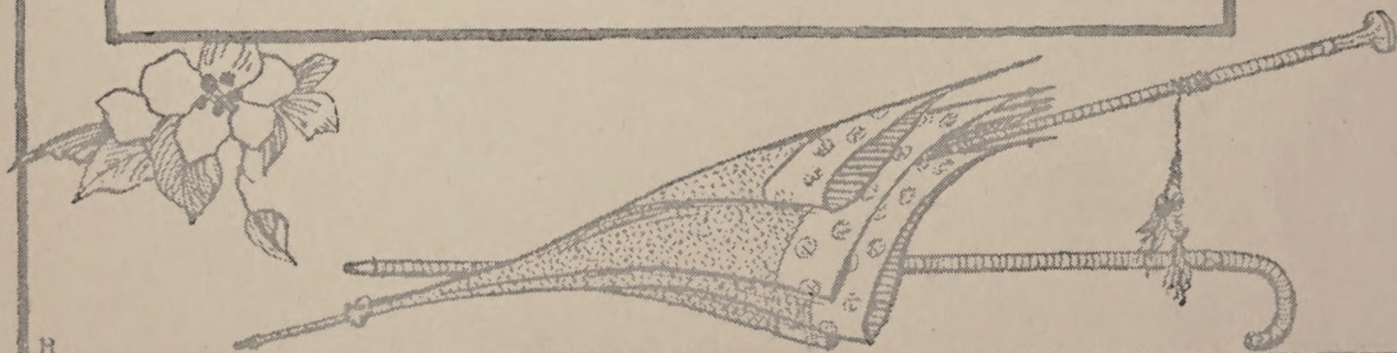
"The girl who said she recognized the envelope you sent me the other day. Perhaps she wants to ask the way home."


Miss Yarnell rode out of the crossroad full tilt, and only checked her sorrel when his nose was within a foot of the gray mare's. Fessenden viewed this characteristic impetuosity with curiosity, which changed to amazement when his eyes fell upon her face. Her eyes were blazing, and her teeth were clenched.

She did not wait to be interrogated, but faced the calash-top.

"I've been looking for you!" she cried. "Come out here where we can talk." Her tones were not loud, but her voice was choked with passion, and she lifted her riding-whip as she spoke. "Come out! I want to have a talk with you."

The response was more prompt than she could have anticipated. Before she could carry out her evident purpose of forcing her uneasy horse to the very dashboard, Fessenden slipped from the landau, ducked under the mare's head, and, seizing the sorrel by the bit, forced him back.





“What’s up, Miss Yarnell?” he said, with stern jocularity. “You mustn’t ride into people’s laps, you know.”

“Oh, I don’t want *you*,” she said. “I want *her*.” Again the silver-mounted whip was brandished toward the calash-top.

Betty’s piquant face emerged from its depths. “Are you looking for me?” she asked very sweetly.

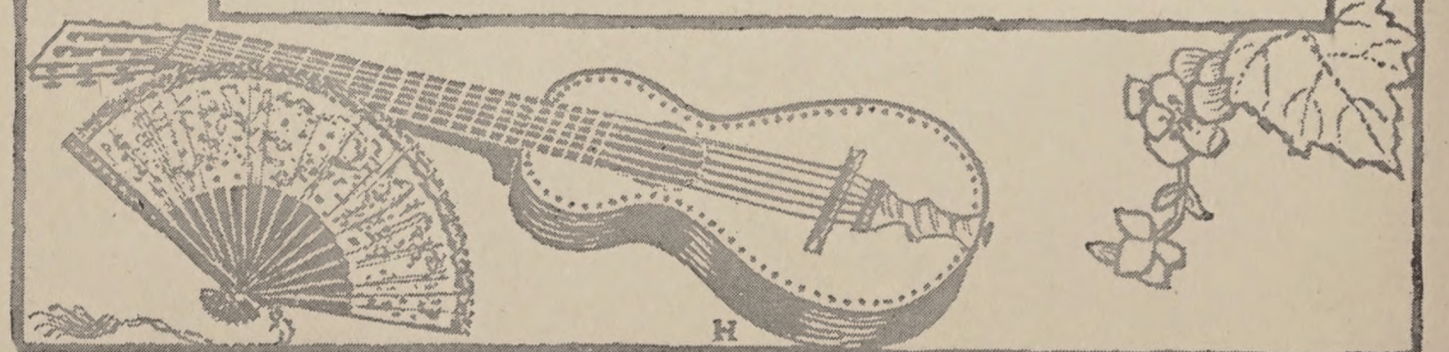
Miss Yarnell’s arm fell. She stared at the childish face—at the wide-opened blue eyes and slender figure.

“O-oh!” Her voice was tremulous, all hint of violence gone from it. “*You!* I thought it was—I thought it was some one else.”

“At any rate, it isn’t proper to threaten one with a whip,” said Betty gravely.

“I—I know it. There!” Her arm swung up, and the whip spun a flashing arc through the air before falling into a field of ripening wheat. “The hateful thing!” She faced the girl again. “I’m sorry. I’ve been acting like a fool. I beg your pardon—and yours too, Mr. Fessenden.”

She checked the horse she had already started to wheel, and appealed to Betty. “I *must* ask you. I came after you because I thought you



were—were some one else. I thought so because of that envelope Thursday.”

“A Baltimore friend of mine happens to have lent me a box of her notepaper.” There was impatience in Betty’s explanation.

“O-oh, I see! But—please!—that telegram from Charlie to him”—she indicated Fessenden. “I supposed—some one—had sent that—to put me off the track.”

“It wasn’t sent from White Cottage.”

“Then it was real?”

“I know nothing about it,” returned the girl icily.

Miss Yarnell wheeled her horse. “It was real! And I’ve been wasting time—wasting time!” Going helter-skelter, she was out of sight before Fessenden had time to resume his seat in the carriage.

“Whew!” he said, as they resumed their jog-trot pace. “She *is* a queer fish! But, Betty, why tell a tarradiddle, even to get rid of her?”

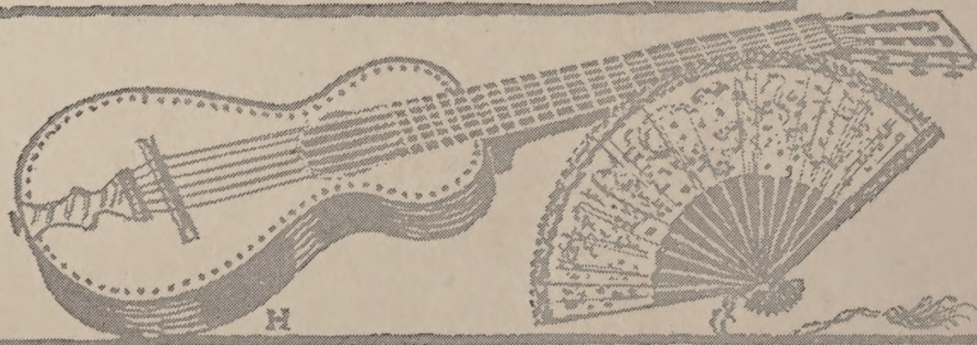
“I didn’t.”


“I mean about the telegram you sent me.”

“I didn’t send you one.”

“What! One came—signed by Charles Danton, too, just as we arranged last night.”

“I had nothing to do with it. After you went





away, I remembered that I didn't know your real name, and I was afraid a telegram for 'Bob White, Esquire,' left in the servants' hands, would go wrong. So I didn't send it. I wondered how you'd get away to meet me, but I knew you would contrive some excuse."

In his mind's eye, he saw the address of the telegram, "Thomas Fessenden," yet it was true that his identity was unknown to his companion—through her own caprice, to be sure.

He gave a long whistle. "Then that wire really was from Danton. By Jove! if he wanted my advice about anything, he ought to have let me know in time. Confound him, it's too late now! It serves him right."

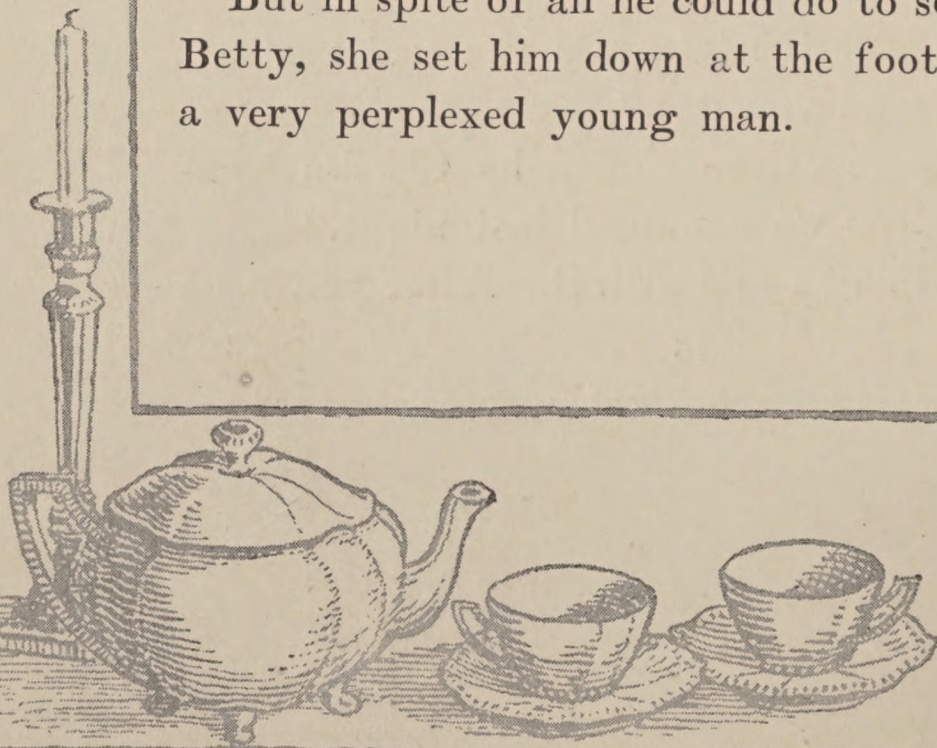
He turned to look for sympathy in Betty's eyes, only to find there a light that baffled him.

"Are you angry with me about anything?"

"I'm not sure whether I am or not. Men are so—so bad, and so presumptuous."

"Good heavens! Have *I* done anything?"

But in spite of all he could do to solve this new Betty, she set him down at the foot of the lane a very perplexed young man.





VII


AT Sandywood, Fessenden was little surprised to learn that Miss Yarnell had been summoned home to Baltimore—on account of sickness in her family.

“I think she must have gotten a telegram at the station,” said Polly Cresap. “She’d been out riding, and when she came in she was in quite a flutter, and told us she had to go home immediately. I really didn’t understand just who was sick. We’re to send her things after her. You didn’t see her at Sandywood Station, did you, Tom? She must have taken the same train you came in on.”

“No,” returned Fessenden, truthfully enough. “She’s rather a headlong sort, don’t you think?”

“Yes, I suppose so. But, poor girl, she has a good deal on her mind! You know, before this disgraceful affair of Charlie Danton’s with——”

“Polly!” said her husband warningly.



"I don't care, Pinck. You know everybody says so."

"But nobody knows anything, my dear."

"At any rate," she rattled on, "before this affair, Madge was quite fond of Charlie Danton, and now I believe she's eating her heart out."

"Remember, Fessenden has just been up to Baltimore to meet Danton," cautioned Cresap. "How do you know it wasn't about this very thing?"


"Oh, goodness, Tom! Am I rushing in where angels fear to tread?"

"Not at all," he assured her. "Danton didn't mention the matter at all."

"Besides, Polly," said Cresap, "no girl eats her heart out nowadays. That sort of thing dates back to hoop-skirts and all that. Madge Yarnell can take care of herself, I'll wager."

The next day was Sunday, and for Fessenden the morning dragged rather wearily. But after luncheon he had the inspiration to suggest a sail in the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*. May Belle and Cleborne announced that they had already arranged to go for a walk together, but the others avowed their willingness to sail.

The wind was fresh, and Mrs. Dick Randall sat beside Fessenden at the wheel, and met the flying spray merrily. Dick himself flirted with Polly



Cresap under the protection of the jibsail forward. Cresap drowsed accommodatingly at full length in the lee gangway.

"Harry Cleborne and May Belle think two are company," said Mrs. Dick.

"Are they engaged?"

"Oh, I imagine there's only an understanding."

"Do you think that sort of arrangement is dignified?"

"What a funny way to put it! No, I don't think so, now that you put it that way. Madge Yarnell, now—Charlie Danton and she had only an understanding—everybody took it for granted they'd be married some day—and look how it's turned out."

"But I understood their falling-out was due to outside influence—wasn't it?"

"Partly, of course. But a regular engagement would have had more dignity about it, just as you say, and they would have had to be more careful."

"No doubt."

"Now, there's Roland Cary——" went on Mrs. Dick.

"The handsome cousin Polly spoke of the other day?"

"Yes. There's a dignified person for you."

Hum-m! Dignified in some ways, but a perfect dee-vil in others."

"He must be a very interesting sort. I'd like to meet him."

"Oh, he—he *is* interesting. But I'm worried about Madge and Charlie Danton's case."

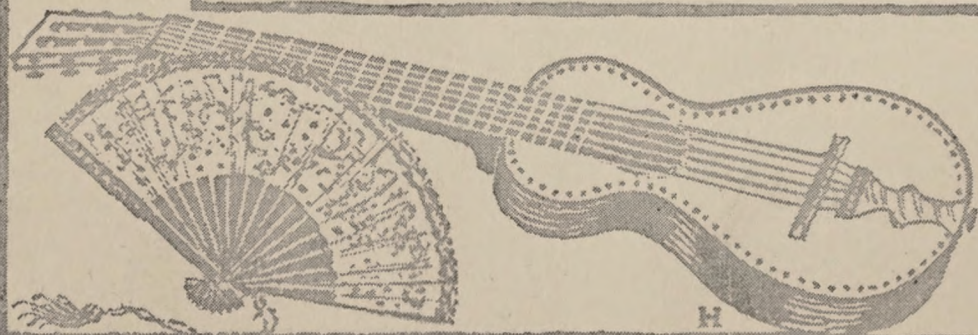
"I agree with Cresap—Miss Yarnell will follow her own course, whatever that may be."

"I suppose so."

The bracing air and the dancing yacht, if not the conversation, held Fessenden's interest for an hour or two. As he headed toward home, the glory of the day put a happy idea into his head. He would return Betty's picnic of yesterday by a day's sail on the *Wisp*. Somehow he would manage to elude his Sandywood responsibilities again.

Darkness always fell long before dinner was served at Sandywood. Therefore, Fessenden, going for a stroll in the wilderness of a garden, ostensibly to indulge in an ante-prandial cigar, found in the dusk no difficulty in extending his walk to White Cottage.

A boyish sense of romance always took possession of him when he approached Betty's vicinity. A knock at the cottage door, and a direct inquiry for her, would have been too commonplace. No workaday method of communication would suffice



under a sky shot with stars and in an air a-tingle with spring.

Lights shone in a couple of rooms in the upper part of the house, while the lower story was in darkness. Apparently, the farmer's family was already preparing to retire for the night.

Fessenden scouted about the place, smiling to himself at the absurdity of his own action.

There was nothing to indicate which room was Betty's, and at a venture he tossed a handful of gravel against the panes of the corner room—then another.

Betty's head and shoulders were the response, framed in the glow of the lamp gleaming through the white curtain behind her. The face, delicately oval, and the slender throat, seemed wrought of gold.

" 'So shines a good deed in a naughty world,' " said Fessenden aloud.

"Who's there?" she called.

"It's I."

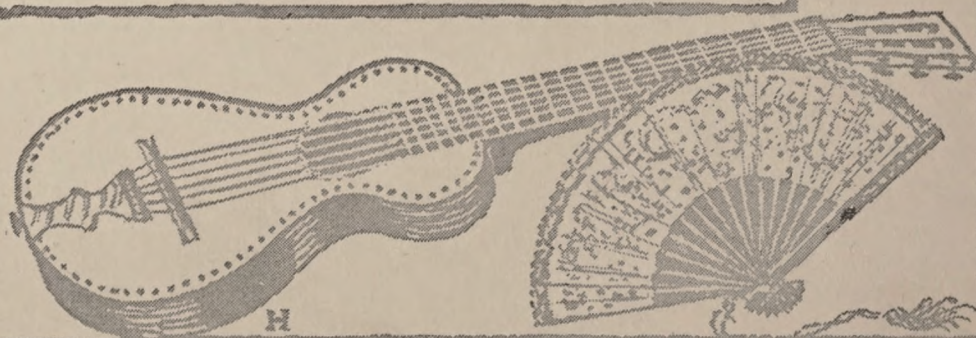
"Oh, *you!* "

"Yes. Can you come down a minute?"

"No."

"Please come down, Betty. I want to see you about something."

"No-o, I can't. Is it anything important?"



“ Immensely important. You aren’t vexed with me still, are you? ”

“ Of course not. And, Bob White, I didn’t tell you yesterday, but I did appreciate it very much.”

“ Good!—but what? ”

“ The way you jumped out of the carriage and seized her horse, when she was so belligerent. It was very capable in you.”

“ If it weren’t dark down here, you could see me blushing. Come down and see.”

“ No. Bob White, you haven’t come around here like a Romeo to—to say good-by, have you? ”

“ Heaven forbid, Betty! I want to ask you to go on a picnic with *me* to-morrow, in my sail-boat.”

“ Oh, goody! Hum-m! I don’t know. For how long? ”

“ All day. We can sail down to Rincoteague Island and back.”

“ Who’s to go? ”

“ Only you and I, of course.”

“ I’m afraid that wouldn’t be quite—well, quite——”

“ Oh, I see. Then your aunt is invited, too, of course—but reluctantly.”



“We’ll come,” she said, with decision. “Shall we bring the luncheon?”

“No. The sloop has a lot of stuff on board now. Besides, there used to be a hotel on Rincoteague—such as it was. I’ll have the *Wisp* in Piney Cove at nine to-morrow. We must start early, you know.”

“We’ll be there. Thank you very much.”

“Betty, do come out a minute—long enough to shake hands. I haven’t seen you all day.”

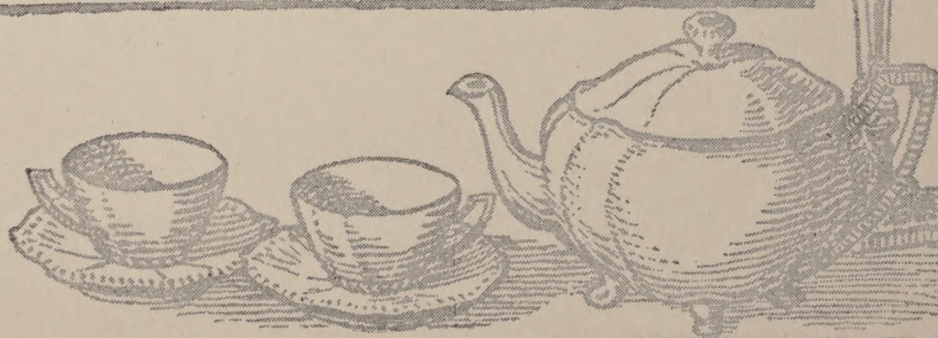
“You funny man!” she said. “If I weren’t—a farmer’s girl, I should think you were flirting.”


He was unable to muster an instant reply. A shade, snapped sharply down, cut the fair hair and laughing face from his view.

There was nothing left for him to do but to make his way back to Sandywood, which he did very thoughtfully.

After dinner the men grouped themselves in easy chairs at a corner of the porch, to enjoy their cigarettes. Harry Cleborne drew his chair to Fessenden’s.

“Will you try one of my home-grown, Mr. Fessenden?” he proffered. “That tobacco was raised on my own plantation.”





Fessenden accepted a cigar, suddenly conscious that Cleborne's unwonted attentions must have an ulterior motive.

"Thank you. You're a Marylander, then?"

"Virginian," returned the other. "My home's in old Albemarle. I've seen a good deal of Maryland the last year or two, though." His eyes strayed toward the white gowns of the women.

"Maryland has its attractions," said Fessenden.

"Yes, that's so—even for you?"


"Oh, yes, for me, too."

Cleborne folded his arms, crossed one leg over the other, and blew a long cloud of smoke. "Look here, Mr. Fessenden," he said, "that's what I want to speak to you about—Maryland attractions." He spoke with evident embarrassment. "May Belle—Miss Cresap—and I saw you yesterday, sitting on the wall at the end of the lane to White Cottage."

"Hum! You did?"

"Yes. We were out for an early morning walk. Of course, then, we know you didn't go to Baltimore—not on the morning train, at any rate."

"Well?"



Impatience showed in Fessenden's tone, and the other went on quickly: "We were out for a stroll again this evening, and—you may think it's none of my business, but we saw *her*. She was at the window as we passed the house."

"You seem to be fond of walking."

"It was entirely an accident both times. But it won't do, Mr. Fessenden."

"May I ask *what* won't do?"

"I don't want to be impertinent, sir—you're an older man than I—but, of course, it's easy enough to guess that you've been going over to White Cottage because *she's* there. Isn't that so?"

"Certainly it's so. But is there any harm in that?"

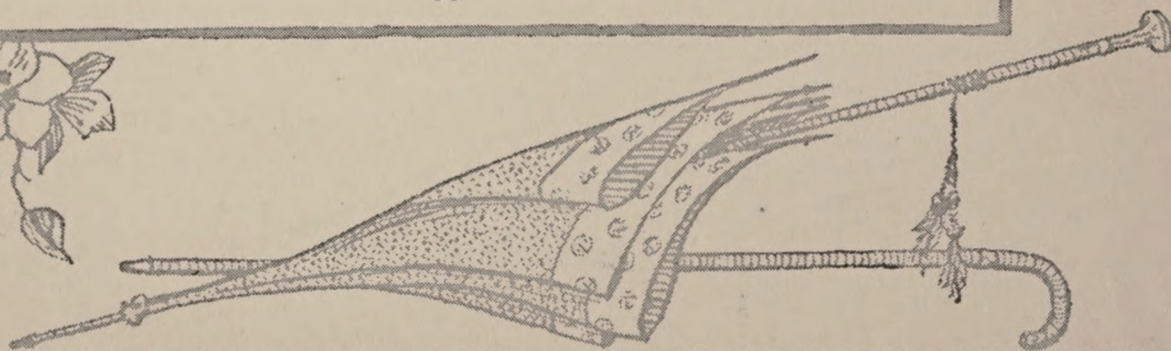
"There may not be any harm *yet*, but won't there be?"


"This is ridiculous. Betty isn't much more than a child—a very charming one, I admit."

"Who?" demanded Cleborne, "Betty?"

"Betty Landis, man. Aren't you talking about her?"

"Never heard of her," returned the other shortly. "I'm talking about you know whom, Mr. Fessenden. I'm sorry I spoke. I wanted



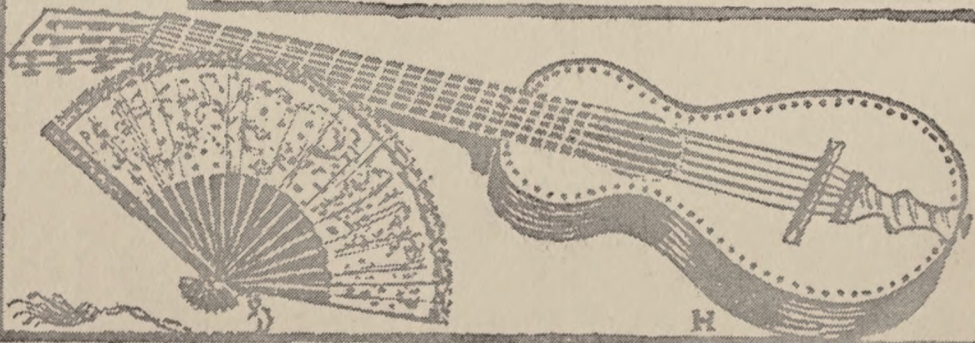



to give you a friendly hint that you should let another man look after his—his *own* himself. I don't care to be laughed at in this way."

"What the devil do you mean?"

Cleborne pushed back his chair savagely. "I'm through," he snapped.

As good as his word, he stalked off to join May Belle.






VIII

DAWN was reddening the leaves of the oak outside the window when Fessenden awoke. From the great bay below the house came the ruffle of water—the wind was freshening. But it was not the mutter along the shore, nor the tang of the salt air, that had aroused him.

What could that idiot, Cleborne, have been driving at in his talk of Betty? No, Cleborne had declared he had never heard of her. Then whom could his dark hints be about? Was the Virginian a subtle joker, acting at the instigation of Polly or Mrs. Dick? It was not unlikely. And did Madge Yarnell's peculiar conduct have any connection with the matter?

While he was still puzzling over Cleborne's words, he fell asleep, and when he awoke again, at a more reasonable hour, his mind instantly became too full of plans for the day's excursion with Betty to hold any conflicting thoughts.



At eight o'clock he ate his eggs, toast, and coffee, solving the problem of presenting a sufficient excuse for his proposed day's absence by the simple process of not attempting it.

At the last moment, the freshening wind suggested the probable need of ample protection from the weather. Accordingly, he carried a double armful of steamer-rugs and rain-coats from the house to the *Wisp*.

In five minutes he was standing for Piney Cove. It took him half an hour or more to reach it, for the wind, blowing steadily from the northwest, held him back. He was rewarded by finding Betty and Aunty Landis awaiting him on the beach.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Landis. Hail, Dryad of the Pines!"

"Hail, Old Man of the Sea!"

Her eyes were as clear as twin pools; her lips were smiling, ready as always to laugh with him or at him, as opportunity might offer. She held her head with that defiant tilt of the chin that was to him one of her always-remembered characteristics. The sunlight flashed from the bay to the shining braid of her hair.

Her white sailor suit was set off by two daring bands of color—a scarlet handkerchief at her throat, and a scarlet sash about her waist. That

most effective head-dress, a man-o'-war's-man's white hat, crowned her head. Fessenden's eyes dwelt upon her with such frank delight that she blushed a little as Mrs. Landis followed her on board the *Wisp*.

The course was set southeast for Rincoteague Island. After a dubious phrase or two about the weather, Aunty Landis ensconced herself just within the opened doors of the little cabin. Here she produced an infinite number of gigantic stockings (male) from a work-bag, and proceeded to darn them.

"I hope both you and your aunt are good sailors," said Fessenden. "It promises to be a bit rough before we get back."


"Oh, yes. I hope it does blow. To be wet and cold, and to see the water boiling up ready to drown us—that would be living!"

"You strange child! You have a philosophy all your own. Did you know that?"

She nodded sagely. "Of course. I hate people who haven't. That's one reason I like you."

"Thank you. I'm glad to hear you confess that there's more reasons than one. I like *you* because—because you seem to me to be all golden. Perhaps the sun dazzles me."





"Perhaps," she smiled.

"You and the day are golden, but remember the song in Cymbeline:

"Golden lads and girls all must
As chimney sweepers come to dust."

"'Golden lads and girls,' " she repeated softly. "Oh, they can never come to dust while there are days like this to sail and sail!"

Her arms, extended yearningly, as if she would have plucked the secret of youth from the tossing bay, fell to her side. "I wish we could sail forever—never to go back to the sad land."


He thrilled. "So do I. Let's do it—you and I together."

"And Aunt Landis?"

"I'm not so sure about Aunt Landis. The stockings might give out, you know."

They had left Piney Cove not long after nine. With the strong northwester behind them, they made such progress that before two o'clock they were in sight of their destination.

Rincoteague Island lies on the very border-line between ocean and bay. On the eastern side, it is crowned by a straggling forest of pine and oak, and looks almost boldly toward the near waters of the Atlantic. A small hotel, and rows of bath-



houses, mark it as a “resort”—a resort sustained by the excursion steamer that makes daily trips thereto from the towns of the mainland.


Although aware that the *Wisp* had been making extraordinary speed, it was not until Fessenden bore up direct for Rincoteague that he realized how the wind was freshening. He had put his helm down a little carelessly, and instantly a cupful of water took him in the back. He glanced astern, to find quite a sea racing after.

“Positively it’s roughing up,” he said. “Will you be afraid to face a head sea going home, Betty?”

“No, indeed; not with such a sailor as you, Bob White.”

“Good! The sloop could live through a hurricane, ‘so let the wild winds blow-ow-ow.’”

They stood in for Rincoteague pier. The excursion steamer had just disgorged its passengers there, and the sight of the horde convinced the party on the *Wisp* that the inevitable fish-and-oyster dinner at the hotel was not likely to prove a thing of beauty. Accordingly, Betty took the wheel and skilfully put the sloop alongside a smaller pier—rather rotted and insecure, to be sure—on the lee or ocean side of the island.

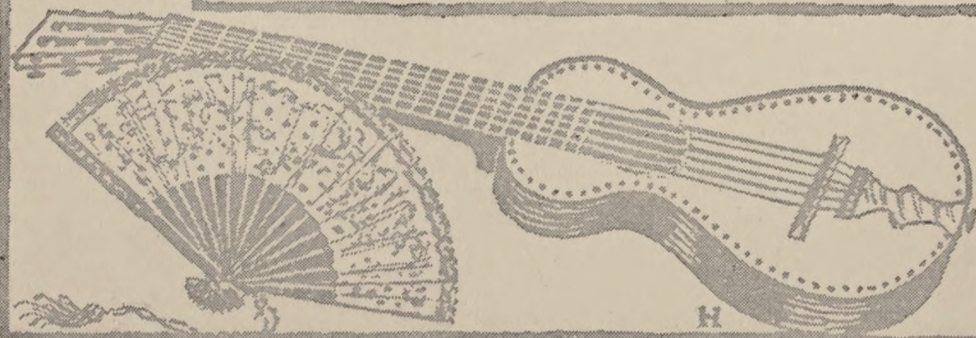



While Fessenden was making the *Wisp* fast, Mrs. Landis and Betty explored the larder, with highly satisfactory results. Potted slices of chicken, strawberry jam, boxed crackers, pickles, and aerated waters of several sorts, furnished "eatin' stuff enough for anybody," as Mrs. Landis avowed. She herself had thought to bring half a dozen wooden picnic plates and a complement of knives, forks, and spoons.

"Did you stock the *Wisp* for a polar expedition, Bob White?" asked Betty.

"Oh, all this stuff was left in her by the man I bought her from. I suppose it would have been more trouble to move the stores than they were worth. Have you everything you want? Then 'all ashore that's going ashore!'"

They ate their luncheon in a sheltered hollow at the lower end of the islet. A projecting clay bank, a huge stranded log, and an overhanging holly-tree made almost a cave of it. Aunt Landis was a highly satisfactory chaperon. After luncheon, when she was not darning, she was perusing a pamphlet of Sunday School lessons. And when this was finished, she brought a leather-bound memorandum-book from the bottomless work-bag, and entered upon an intricate calculation of household accounts.





Fessenden chatted with Betty. He had not yet begun to analyze the reasons for the pleasure he felt in her company, or hardly to understand that the farmer's daughter who could hold a man of his experience by her side for the better part of three days must possess extraordinary charm.

"Now we are in the pirates' den," said Betty, "and that log is a treasure-chest full of—of what?"

"Of doubloons and pieces of eight. I'm the pirate chief, and you are my captured bride."

"Oh, goodness!"

"Do you know, I made a remark something like that to Miss Yarnell the other day, and she took it quite seriously?"

"Was she afraid of the pirate chief?"

"She eyed me in that brooding, blazing way of hers—you remember how she looked when she tried to ride over us on the road the other day?"


"Remember!"

"Exactly. She eyed me in that fashion, then thanked me for the suggestion."

"What did she mean?"

"I haven't the least idea. Betty, what do you know about her?"

The girl put her hand suddenly on his arm. "What was that? A drop of water? I do be-



lieve it's going to rain. And hear the surf! It's fairly roaring. It must be blowing hard. I wonder if the yacht is all right."

The thought brought them to their feet, and out of their sheltered hollow. They found a changed world.

While they ate, clouds had been gathering west and north, and now seemed to fill the whole space from bay to sky. A mile or two beyond the island, a white line advancing over the churning waters gave promise of a furious squall. Worst of all, the wind had risen until, even on their leeward side of the island, the swell was momentarily growing heavier.

"By George!" said Fessenden. "It looks as if we were in for it. Betty, we'd better have a look at the *Wisp*. That rotten old wharf!"

"I'll race you to it!" she cried.

He overtook her in half a dozen strides, and throwing his arm about her shoulders, fairly swept her along with himself. She came no higher than his shoulders as she ran. Her eyes laughed up at him, and her shining hair brushed his lips. Aunt Landis was left hopelessly in the rear.

At the old pier, the waves, running far in beneath the flooring, were breaking against the ancient piles, while the structure complained in

every joint. The *Wisp*, tied stem and stern to a string-piece, was plunging furiously.

"She seems to be all right," said Fessenden, "but I think I'll put an extra half-hitch in each of those lines." He still steadied Betty against the wind as he spoke. "It wouldn't be pleasant to be forced to go home in that excursion boat."

Releasing his companion, reluctantly enough, he made his way out on the wharf. She promptly followed.

"Go back, child. The wind will blow you away."


"I'm—all—right," she gasped as he bent over the stern-line. "The rain will be here in a minute, and we'll need the rain-coats." She sprang aboard gaily.

"Come back!" he ordered. "I don't believe it's safe, Betty."

"Only a minute," she called. She waved a careless hand and dived into the cabin.

At that instant, a wave struck the *Wisp* on the inboard quarter and heaved her strongly outward. The stern-line held staunchly, but under the tremendous strain the string-piece gave way like the rotted punk it was, not a foot in front of Fessenden.





“Betty!” he roared. “Betty!”

His cry stirred the heart of the girl within the cabin, and brought her instantly onto the floor of the cockpit. Before she could realize the danger of the situation, the worst had occurred.

He was already kneeling at the forward line, heaving hand over hand to haul the bow of the *Wisp* alongside. The sloop was almost within reach when another wave struck her. The line was snatched from his fingers, and the yacht, flung to the full length of the rope, carried away the string-piece as before. The *Wisp* was adrift!


As the timber sank under his feet, Fessenden clutched at a wharf stanchion. By a miracle, he saved himself from going overboard.

As if recoiling from the freedom so suddenly won, the *Wisp* took a slight sheer toward the pier. The tide, running like a mill-race, swept her broadside past Fessenden.

“Betty!”

The girl, her body lithe and alert, had been steadying herself by the safety-rail of the cabin roof. Her face had whitened at the sight of Fessenden’s peril, but it was only now, in response to his hoarse shout, that a sound escaped her.

“Bob White!” she cried, her arms suddenly



extended in piteous appeal. "Oh, Bob White!"

The watery space between the wharf and the sloop was hopelessly wide, but, uttering an inarticulate and despairing oath, he took two running steps and leaped.

He struck fair on his feet on the very rail of the *Wisp*, stood tottering, fought wildly for his balance—and then Betty's firm little hand plucked him safely inboard.

"Thank you, Bob White," she said.


There was no time to return even a smile in answer. He gripped the wheel and gave the sloop a sheer with the hope of beaching her outright. But wind and wave caught her.

"Close the hatch!" he roared.

As it happened, the forward hatch-cover was already in place. Betty snapped to the sliding storm-door of the cabin barely in time. A sea swept the *Wisp* from end to end, flattening Betty against the side of the cabin, and nearly swamping the yacht at a blow.

Fessenden was glad to escape by putting the craft dead before the wind. Bare-poled as she was, the *Wisp* fled southeastward like a frightened thing. The rain, the clouds, and the night overtook them together.

With a thrill, Fessenden felt a long, regular



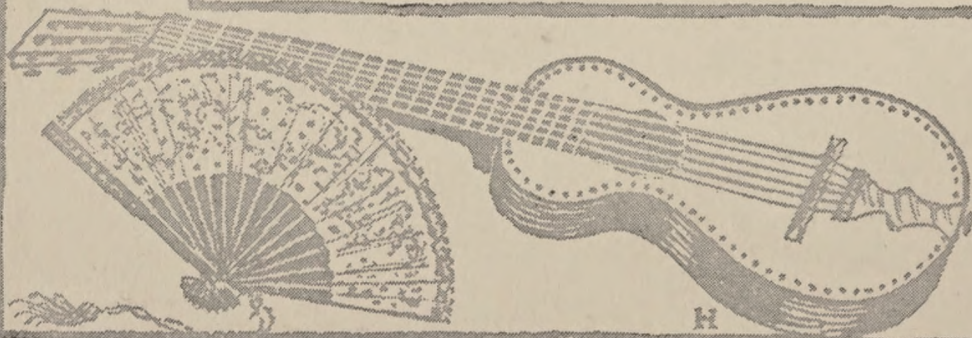
swell suddenly begin to lift the battling yacht. There was still enough of daylight to permit him a sight of Betty's pale little face.

"Betty," he said, "don't be frightened, but I'm afraid we're clear of the Capes. This feels like the Atlantic."

She made a staggering rush and reached the lockers. There she sat down beside him as he struggled with the wheel. The spray flew clear over them again and again.

She laid her wet cheek an instant against his arm. "The ocean?" she said. "I hope you won't be seasick, Bob White. I know *I* won't."

"You're a trump," he said.





IX


Now and then the sloop yawed alarmingly as they ran before the wind.

"This won't do," said Fessenden. "I must get some sail on to steady her. Do you think you're strong enough to hold the wheel, Betty?"

She gripped the spokes, her hands beneath his. The quiet strength of his clasp comforted her mind no less than her body,—in a moment she nodded confidently.

Leaving the helm in her charge, Fessenden literally crawled forward. Ordinarily, the jib was handled by means of the sheet led aft through a couple of small blocks to the helmsman, so that one man could both sail and steer without moving from his place. Now, however, the fierceness of the wind impelled Fessenden to extra precautions in his endeavor to make sail.

He took care to wrap the sheet twice about a cleat before hoisting away, but as soon as the jib



rose above the low gunwale, the wind tore it from the lower bolt-ropes, and it blew straight out, held only by the bowsprit halliard.

He would have attempted to recover the ironed-out sail by reaching for it with a boat-hook—a foolhardy undertaking at any time—but Betty, divining his intention as he showed black against the whitening crest of the waves, screamed so shrilly that he desisted. There was nothing left for him to do but to make his way back to the wheel.

“Child,” he said, “you’re wet through, and I’m afraid we’ve a wetter time before us. There’s no use in your staying out here to get soaked every other minute. Go in the cabin, out of harm’s way.”

“But you’re being soaked, too.”

“I’m a man.”

“I’ll stay with you.”

“No, you won’t. I can’t think of letting you do that. Watch your chance and get inside there. Slide the hatch-cover to, sharp, before any water gets in.”

Rather to his surprise, she yielded, and dexterously slipped into the cabin. Although her presence had been more comfort to him than he realized until she was gone, he bent his whole

attention to keeping the *Wisp* from broaching to, which would have meant the end.


The worst of the rain-squall had passed, but the night was as black as a wolf's mouth. The wind blowing half a gale, piled up the waves behind the *Wisp* to a height that might well have proved a menace to a craft three times her size. Thanks to her tight-closed hatches and her seaworthiness, she shed water like a petrel, yet the towering swell of the Atlantic might crush her at any moment. If they fell an instant into the trough of the sea, they were lost.

Fessenden contemplated the possibility of constructing a sea-anchor. But whatever might have been possible for an experienced seaman, his nautical knowledge was too limited for him to undertake the work.

And even if he could make and successfully launch a sea-anchor, the most dangerous part of the task would follow—that long and terrible moment it would take for the sloop to swing round, head on to the sea. The waves might roll her over and over before he could even clasp Betty in his arms. The risk was too great. He breathed an inward prayer, and held the *Wisp* resolutely before the wind.

He had three dangers to face—the ever-present





terror of being overtaken by the following sea, the likelihood of being dashed against a hidden coast in the black night, and the chance of being run down by some merchantman or man-o'-war, threshing through the dark.

Suddenly the cabin hatch snapped open and shut again.

"Betty!"

"I'm going to stay with you."

"Go back."

"No. See, I'm wrapped up splendidly. And here are oilskins for you."

Indeed, a quaint figure she made of it, in a rain-coat miles too big for her slender body, and a sou'wester hat, somewhere discovered, fairly engulfing her little head.

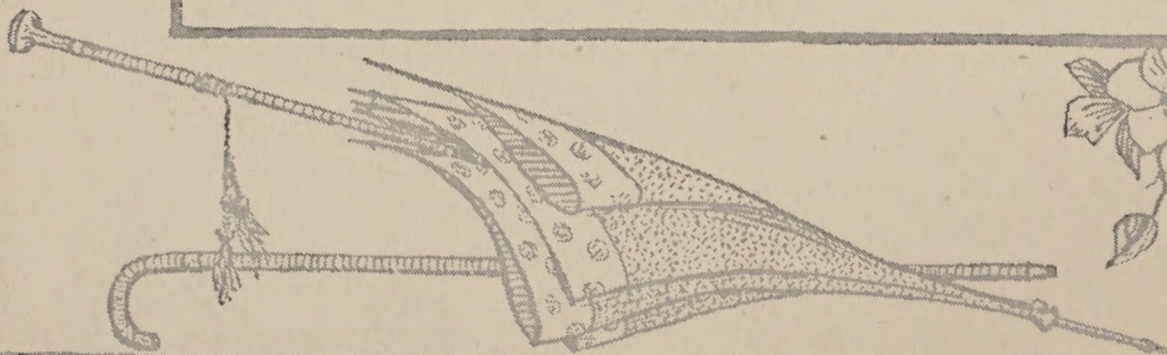
For the first time that night, he laughed boyishly. "You dear child! You mustn't stay, though."


"Put these on, Bob White. Perhaps you'll get dry underneath."

Still keeping a controlling hand on the wheel, he managed with Betty's help to encase himself in the fisherman's oilskins she had found.

"Now, then," he said, "you must go in."

For answer, she seated herself beside him. "No, I want to stay here. I'm afraid to be alone in





there—with you out here, and the dreadful black water all about.”

“I thought you weren’t afraid of anything.”

“I’m going to stay.”

“You can’t, Betty. I order you to go in.”

“I won’t go.”

“Betty,” he cried in despair, “it will be better for me if you’re out of the way. Don’t you see?”

“No-o, I don’t.”

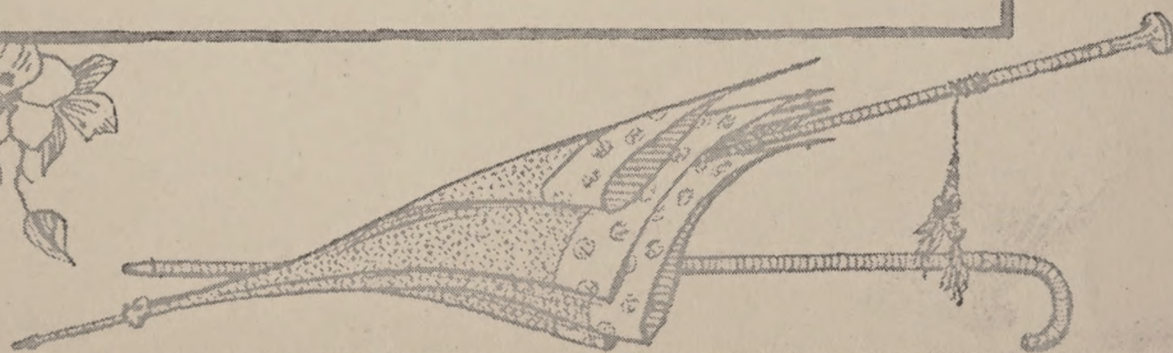
“You’ll be safer.”

“You know I won’t. You’re only trying to make me comfortable, while you are left out here in the cold and wet. Let me stay. If—if we must be drowned, I want to be near you, Bob White—please.”

There was no resisting this appeal. A thrill of pity went through him as he looked down at the slight form crouching under the all-too-low gunwale. She should not die if he could prevent it.

“Can you see the compass?” he asked. “How are we heading?”

She rubbed a little of the brine from the binnacle-glass. “Yes; now I see it. North is where that mark is, isn’t it? Oh, I know—southwest by south.”



"What? Look again."

"That's right. Sou'west by sou'."

"Then the wind is shifting to the northeast. Betty, we're headed for Cape Hatteras."

The dread name apparently produced no alarm in the girl's mind. "I've always wanted to be in a storm off Hatteras."

"Well, you're likely to have your wish before morning, if this gale keeps up."

"If we reach Cape Hatteras in the dark like this—abruptly—what will happen?"

"I fancy we'll hurt Cape Hatteras's feelings."

"Oh!"

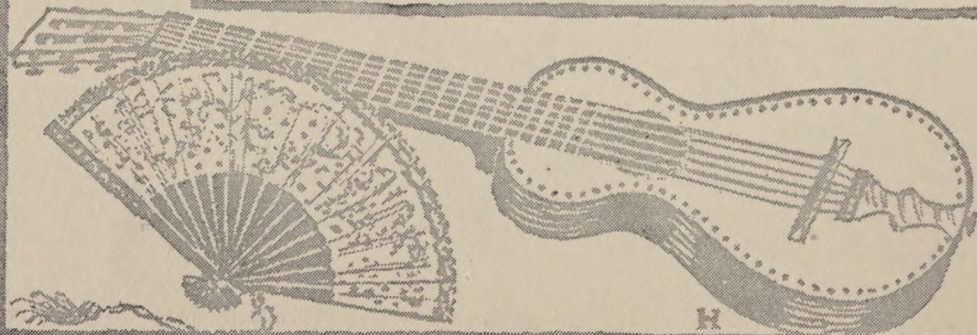
After a silence, he felt her hand touch his arm as if she needed comfort.

"Poor little girl," he said. "Don't worry. I won't let anything hurt you."

"I know. I'm—all right."

"There's plenty of ocean about Hatteras," he went on, rather to reassure her than because of his belief in what he said. "We may not get near the land. Even if we do, Pamlico Sound is just behind it—there's only a sort of stretched-out island between the sound and the ocean. We might slip right through an inlet into the Sunny South."

"It isn't—very likely, is it?"



"It's quite possible," he maintained.

Presently, to his delight as well as to his surprise, he heard a little crowing laugh.

"What is it?"

"Aunty Landis! Goodness! I never thought of her until this minute. What will she do?"

"Go home on the excursion steamer, of course. But she'll have to stay all night at the hotel. The steamer isn't likely to risk crossing the bay during this blow."

"You don't suppose she'll think we're drowned? She may be in a terrible fright over us."


"Oh, I hope not."

Hour after hour wore on, and still the storm drove them southward. All night Fessenden, in a way that was afterward a marvel to himself, fought a ceaseless battle with the sea and wind. His hands were numb and his feet were like ice, but he stood staunchly to his task.

In spite of his urgings, renewed from time to time, Betty crouched beside him all night long. She too was cold, colder even than he, for she could not warm herself by action. Still she held her post. Perhaps she knew that her presence there was an inspiration to him as real as the sight of the flag to the fighting soldier.

Toward morning the clouds broke overhead.





The stars began to shine through. Then, to the relief of the *Wisp's* crew, the wind began to fall, and about dawn the waves had ceased to be formidable.

"Betty," said Fessenden joyfully, "I really believe we've pulled through."

"Hurrah!"

While she held the wheel, he managed to lay hold of the now flapping jib, and to set it after a fashion. This greatly steadied the sloop.

Then, at last, Betty consented to listen to his persuasions to turn in in the cabin.

"We're pretty well out of danger now," he declared, "Go in and rest, Betty. Take off those dripping clothes——"

"Only steaming, please."

"Amendment accepted! But take them off and go to bed. I'm afraid you'll be sick—and then what should I do?"


"Will you promise to wake me in an hour? *You* are the tired one. I've loafed all night."

"I'll wake you when I think it's time to turn the wheel over to you. I promise you that."

"I'll go to bed, then."

"Good! And, Betty, light that oil range and dry your clothes by it. Now, off with you, quick!"





It was full daylight, although the sun was not yet visible. For the first time in many hours their faces were plain to each other's view. Both were pale with the long night's exposure, but both were smiling.

Betty lingered in the act of closing the cabin-hatch upon herself. "You'll be sure to wake me soon?"

"Yes."

"What a night we've had!"


"Rather lively, wasn't it? I assure, I'm glad to see you this morning."

"I'm glad to see *you*. Oh, very glad!"

She closed the hatch gently behind her. No sound of a sliding bolt followed—she trusted him too innocently to lock the door against him.

For a while he heard her moving about, then all was quiet. He pictured her tired little body cuddled under the blankets while a grateful warmth crept over her. He smiled to the gray sea at the thought.


The wind and sea diminished rapidly. The sun rose out of the waste to the east, and the last of the foul weather fled before it. In an hour or so he ventured to hoist the mainsail. The sloop bore it well, and under it made swift progress



toward the southwest. Sooner or later, he knew he must sight land in that direction.

Indeed, it was not yet ten o'clock when a remote gray line took shape off the starboard bow. He could not repress a shout of joy:

"Land! Land ho! Land!"



In a moment the cabin-hatch was opened wide enough to let a sleepy voice be heard. "Did you call me, Bob White?"

"I didn't mean to wake you, child, but land's in sight."

"Land? Oh, that's good! But I must have been sleeping for hours. You oughtn't to have let me be so selfish."

"Not at all. You can do your trick at the wheel whenever you're ready, and I'll turn in a while."

"I'll be out in ten minutes—no, twenty, for I'm going to get breakfast for you."


"Breakfast!"

"Certainly. Do you think you can drink a cup of hot coffee?"

"Jupiter Pluvius! Hot coffee? Alas, I must be mad."

"You'll see," she laughed. "In twenty minutes."

Indeed, it was not long before she again ap-



peared. "I've just come to say good-morning."

"Did you sleep well?"

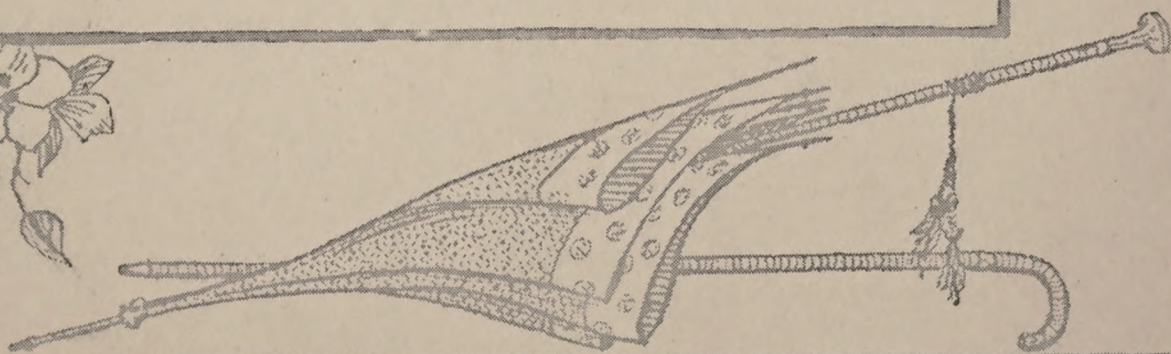
"De-li-ciously. I can only stay a minute—breakfast is cooking. You poor man, you're still in your wet clothes, while I'm as dry as toast."

Her garments, down to her very shoes, spread since dawn on the racks above the range, were dry and even smoothed. Only the scarlet sash and handkerchief were missing—the salt water had ruined them.

The braid of shining hair no longer hung down her back, but now encircled her head in heavy coils, a new and charming arrangement. He was vaguely conscious that it made her look strangely mature, and endowed her with a mysterious dignity.

"I haven't been really wet for some time," he assured her. "If you'll take charge, I'll have a look at the chart in the locker here. Perhaps we can tell where we are."

"I'm not at all sure," he announced after a brief study, "but I think we aren't so far down as Hatteras—the wind fell away very rapidly toward the last. That may be the North Carolina coast, though—Currituck Island, perhaps."



You know the sounds run Currituck, Albemarle, and Pamlico."

"I know the coffee must be boiled and the ham broiled by this time. Take the wheel and let the cook attend to her duties."

She flatly refused to touch any breakfast until he had eaten his fill and waited upon him in spite of his protests. Never had broiled ham, hard crackers, and marmalade tasted so good. And the strong, hot coffee warmed his very soul.

"You wonder!" he said, as he presented the tin cup for more. "Where did you get this gorgeous dinner-set?"

"I found it among the pots and pans in the galley. There's quite an assortment your predecessor left."

"Oh, that coffee! You miracle of a child!"

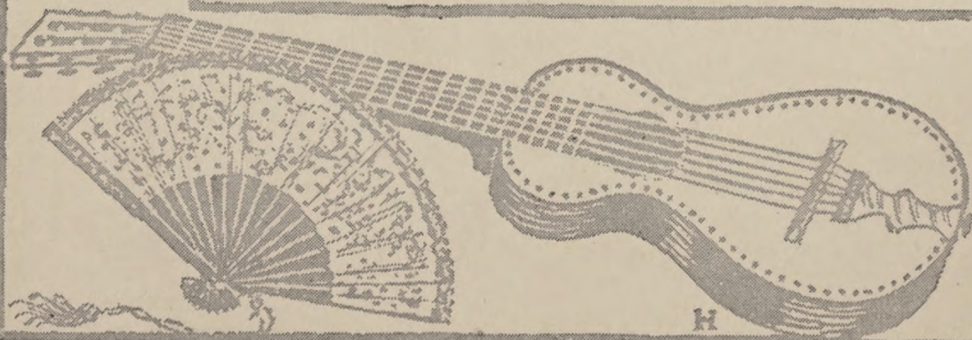
Her eyes sparkled as she watched him swallow a second cup. "What do you think of the cook?"


"I think the cook's an angel."

"Have you finished? Then to bed with you."

"I'm off. Just hold the *Wisp* to the course she's on. Call me when you can make out the land distinctly."

He patted her benevolently upon the shoulder and started forward. "Well, here goes the weary sea-boy to his slumbers."





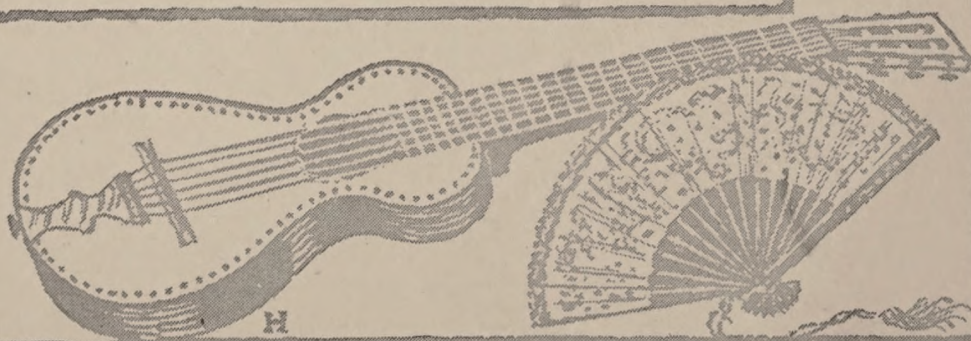
She waved her hand as he descended the fore-castle ladder.

In a little while he slid back the overhead hatch a foot or so and looked out. He was invisible to the fair helmswoman, but the coils of her hair shone just above the top of the cabin roof.

"I'm almost asleep," he called. "Good-night, Betty dear."

He held his breath. Would the intimacy wrought of the night's peril and companionship avail? An answer, low and very gentle, went with him to his dreams.

"Good-night, Bob White—dear."





X

WHEN he awoke, it seemed to him that he had slept a scant half-hour, but his watch, which had come unscathed through the wettings of the night, showed that mid-afternoon had come.

The *Wisp* rose and fell very gently, and he thought with satisfaction that the sea must be entirely calm.

In the tiny bath-room of the forecastle, he revelled in a fresh-water bath. As he passed the looking-glass, he surveyed his face ruefully. In vain to lament his looming beard! A diligent search failed to reveal the razor he had hoped Danton's boatman might have left.

It was only when fully dressed and engaged in smoothing down his hair as best he could that he became aware of a strange thing. There was no sound of rippling water under the *Wisp's* bow.

And then he realized that the gentle motion of the sloop could not be caused by the rise and fall

of the Atlantic swell—a swell majestic even at its calmest. The *Wisp* was not under way, but was at anchor in quiet waters!

He ran up the ladder, shouting: “Betty! Betty! What’s up?”

For his pains, he bumped his head on the half-closed hatch-cover, and for answer to his call heard—nothing. With another cry of “Betty!” he leaped upon deck.

There was no Betty. In a quiet inlet the *Wisp* was lying alongside a float connected by a plank to a pebbly beach. A tongue of land separated the harbor from the outer ocean. At a little distance on this sandy tract appeared a straggling group of houses, and anchored near the *Wisp* was a steam yacht, a pretty craft all white and gold.

All this he took in at a glance. A second disclosed a note pinned to the hatch-cover. He had it open in short order.


BOATSWAIN BOB:

I couldn’t bear to wake you. A man who helped me make fast the *Wisp* says this is Currituck Sound, and the city (?) is Kitty Hawk. I’ve gone to get some things. Be sure your clothes are dry.

NANCY LEE, A.B.

Kitty Hawk was on the chart—of so much he was certain—and he guessed that it contained a





shop to supply its needs. He determined to purchase some sadly needed apparel for himself. In the shop, too, he would be certain to find Betty.

Still a little languid from his experiences of the night, he strolled leisurely along the sandy path. The day was clear and pleasantly warm. On his left the sun glinted upon the now kindly sea, and on his right the seagulls shrieked and fought above the waters of the sound. And presently he would see Betty.

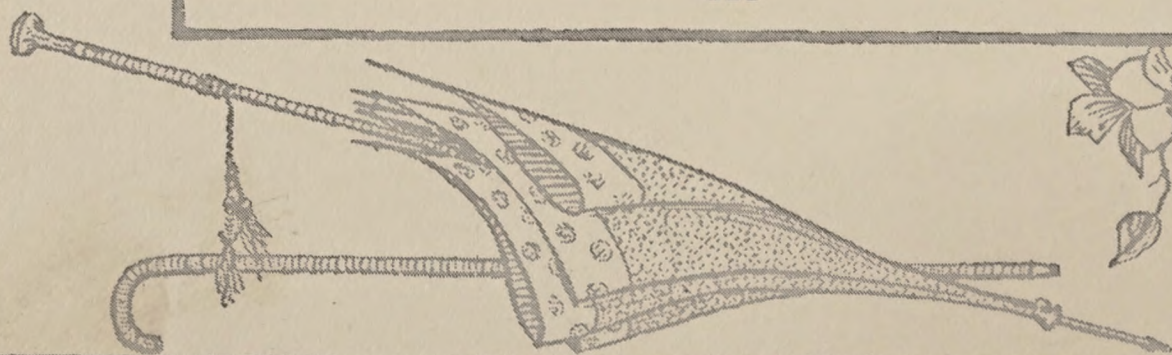
He entered the village. The few people he met greeted him with a stare of frank curiosity, a stare generally followed by a friendly nod.


As he had anticipated, he soon came upon a building bearing a sign:

**BAZAAR. DRYGOODS AND GROCERIES.
POST-OFFICE.**

In front of it a wooden bench extending along the sidewalk, and three or four lank loungers thereupon, furnished irrefutable proof that the centre of Kitty Hawk's business activities was at hand.

He remembered that he had not had a sight of Betty for five hours, and he pushed open the door of the "Bazaar" eager to see again the roguish mouth.





To his disappointment, she was not in the shop. However, the proprietor, a sandy-haired native inclining to corpulency, was prompt to supply his needs, nor was he backward in answering Fessenden's question as to whether or not he had seen a young woman in a white sailor-suit.

"You-all are off the sloop 'at come in jest aftah the big yacht, I reckon. Yes, suh, yoah wife's jest been heah."

"My wife!"

He could have bitten his tongue off the next instant, for the man gave him a sharp, not to say suspicious, look.

"Yes. The young lady's yoah wife, I reckon, suh. Her and you-all come togethah, didn't yo'?"

"Yes—no—that is——" stammered Fessenden.

The shopkeeper stopped in the act of wrapping the assortment of haberdashery and razors Fessenden had picked out.

"It ain't my way to quawl with good money," he said, "but I'm a professin' Baptist, and I'm *obliged* to say if yo' two folks have come sailin' round these parts 'ithout bein' lawfully married—well"—he sighed regretfully—"then, suh, you-all can't buy nothin' in my stoah."

But by this time Fessenden had recovered his

wits. "No, no, man," he said. "You don't understand. She's my daughter."

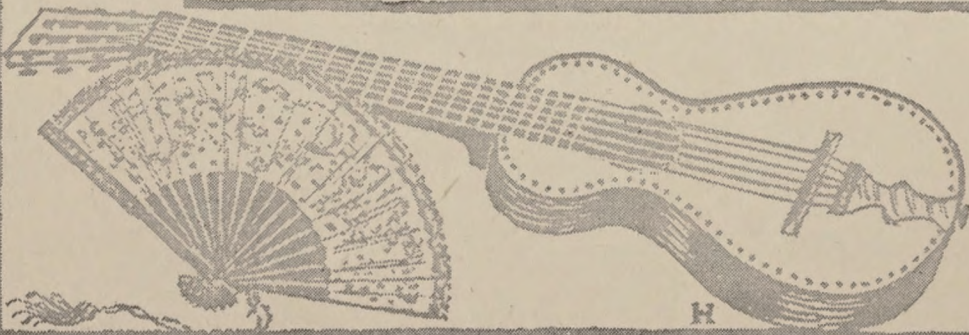
"Oh, yoah daughtah? Then it's all right, of co'se. Yes, suh, I can see now she does favah you-all a heap." Although desirous of being convinced, his suspicions still lingered. "But you-all are a pretty young-lookin' fathah, that's a fact, suh."

"Forty isn't very young," returned Fessenden mendaciously. "Which way did you say she went?"

"Why, she met some of yoah friends from the big yacht. They was in aftah theyah mail. They-all went out togethah. Yoah friends beat you-all consid'abul, didn't they?"

His friends on the big yacht? What was the fellow talking about? Fessenden repressed a half-uttered question. No need to reawaken the man's slumbering suspicions as to the character of himself and Betty! He settled his bill, and left the "Bazaar," bundle in hand.

The shopkeeper's talk had stirred him profoundly. Betty? Good Lord! For the first time he saw how others might look upon their enforced cruise together. She was almost a child, true; but was she near enough to childhood to be beyond the breath of scandal? This was a devilish mess!

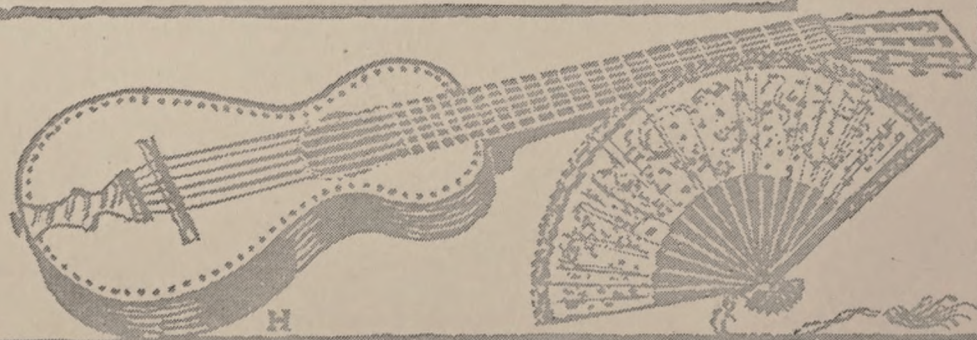


He could not bear to think of himself in such a light. Far less could he patiently endure that through any fault of his—yet his fault was only his presence—her name should be blackened. What could he do? His feet lagged as he pondered, his head hanging.

He knew that Aunty Landis must have borne the news of their disaster to Sandywood. What would thoughtless Polly Cresap say when she learned that he and the farmer's pretty daughter were not drowned after all? And impertinent Harry Cleborne? How would Madge Yarnell judge him? With brooding scorn, perhaps. As for Charlie Danton—Fessenden could picture all-too-clearly his bitter smile, the scar-line twitching the corner of his mouth. By God! he would suffer no sneer from Danton.

He wondered if any of the villagers had conveyed to Betty, even by a look, the suspicions that accursed shopkeeper had thrust upon him! He would find her at once. His presence might act as some sort of shield for her.

Conscious that some one blocked his way, he glanced up sharply. Charlie Danton stood before him—Danton, not sneering, not even smiling, but watching him very gravely.





XI

So near had Danton been to Fessenden's thoughts that he was able instantly to connect the Baltimorean's presence with the shopkeeper's talk of the people from the steam yacht. He was the first to speak.

"Where's Betty?"

"She's with my wife—on the *West Wind*."

"Your wife?"

"Yes. I was married two days ago."

"Danton! You—married? You're joking, old man."

"Not in the least. I was married last Sunday—to Madge Yarnell."

"Madge Yarnell! What!"

"Is Mrs. Charles Danton," said the other.

Fessenden was too dumfounded to do aught but stare. His friend slipped an arm through his and turned him about.

"There's room for us on the bench there. Let's

talk it over. Madge and Betty are doing the same down in the sand-hills now."

Fessenden yielded without a word, and they seated themselves on the bench.

Danton was a man under thirty years. He was slight and pale, and had much of the abrupt manner of that ancestor who had come to Baltimore in the train of Jerome Bonaparte, and who, like his master, had found a wife there.


"You're really married?" said Fessenden. "By Jove! I can't get over it. To Madge Yarnell, too. Then what in the world has become of—of—ah——"

"Of a certain other lady?" appended his friend with perfect coolness. "I don't blame you for wondering about her. But never mind now. I want to tell you about my wedding. It was unique in the history of the Chesapeake, I promise you." His laugh had a ring of heartiness that surprised his listener. "Tom," he went on, "I'll be frank with you. I've been in more than one crooked path in my time, but I'm through with that sort of thing. Thank Heaven!"

The other's amazement found expression. "I swear I don't know you. What's come over you?"

"Love," said Danton simply. "Madge's love, and all that it means. She says she has told you





of that tearing down the flag matter last year. That proved to me and to her that I owned *her*—I'd known for a long time that she owned *me*, you understand—but after that affair she sent me away, and I, in revenge, went after—— I was a cad, I know. Well, I hope I'll never be again."

"About your wedding, old man?"

"I'm coming to that—and I'll skip the long story between. Last Saturday, after Madge met you and Betty on the road, she galloped to Sandywood Station, and sent me a reply to the wire I'd sent you."

"A bit cool, that."

"I've got it my pocket now. Here!" He read the bluish slip, smiling faintly the while.


CHARLES DANTON

The Club, Baltimore.

Impossible to come, but understand. She promises to be *West Wind* eight o'clock Sunday night, ready.

"Hum! What did that mean?"

"It meant that I thought I understood. I thought that you had discovered the—the Other Lady, in the farm-house where she was hiding from me. I believed she'd told you to tell me she was ready—at last. I'd had the *Wisp* stored for that very reason, you know, and then shifted to the



West Wind because it was larger and more seaworthy, in case *she* wanted to go right across to Gibraltar."

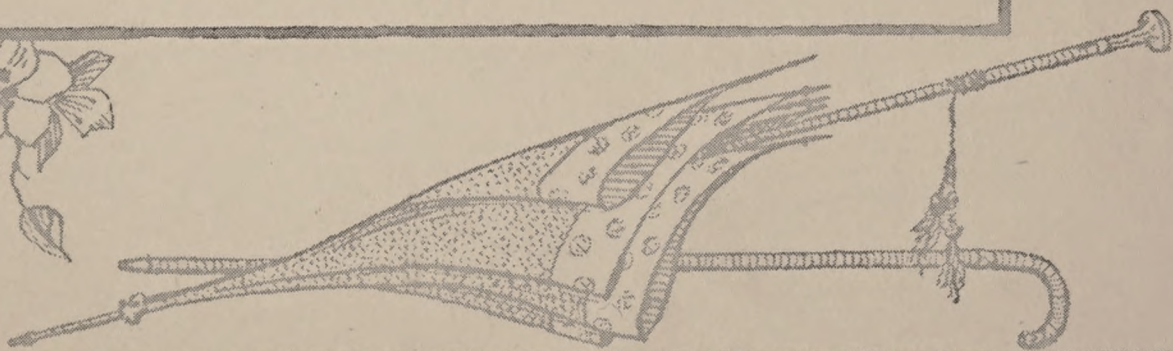
"Was it as near a thing as that?"

"No matter now. The result of the telegram was that I was at Polocoke landing and aboard the *West Wind* by eight o'clock Sunday night. I give you my word I never dreamed of a trick—who would?"

"I don't see——"

"You will in a moment. My skipper, Williams, met me as I came aboard. 'She's below, sir,' he said, 'and gave orders we were to put to sea just as soon as you turned up.' Faithful soul! He didn't know he'd been tricked either—doesn't know it yet, for that matter. He'd run away with the *Queen of India* if he thought I wanted it done. 'Right,' I told him. 'Shove off, and go full speed as soon as you're clear.' With that, I dived down into the main cabin. She wasn't there, and I looked into my stateroom. I couldn't see her there either, so I stepped to the inner stateroom—the two connect, you understand—where I thought she must be."

He smiled soberly at Fessenden's interested face. "Tom," he said, "every word I'm telling you is for your soul's good. It's all the truth, but it's



a parable, too—for you. Well, as I reached the door-way between the two rooms, somebody seized both my elbows from behind. By George! She's as strong as a man."

"What! Not——"

"Yes, Madge."

"Great Scott! I begin to have a glimmer."

"I had just time to see that it *was* Madge before she pushed me inside—into the inner room—and slammed the door behind me. It locked with a spring."

"She was outside?"

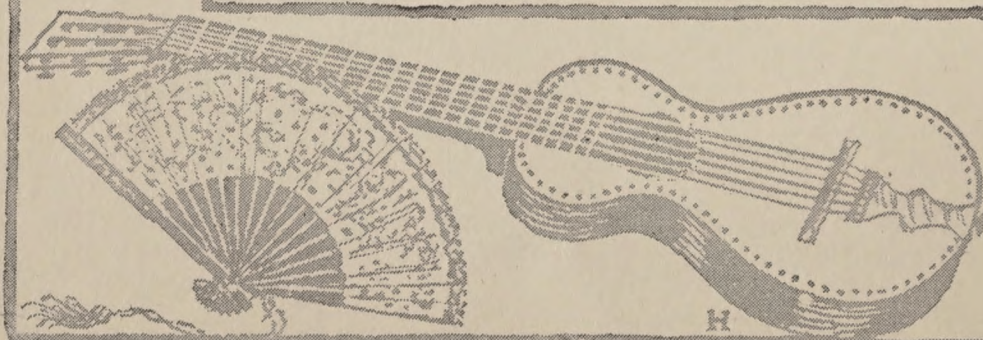
"Yes, in my room. I was inside that."

"I understand."

"Precisely. I fancy I don't need to tell you much more. I was a prisoner in my own yacht, and that yacht headed full speed down the bay, my men acting upon what they thought were my own orders. A lovely girl was in my room. I was as much separated from her as if I were in the moon, but my own crew couldn't know that, and neither could the world."

"She's a heroine."

"She is—the most adorable in the world! She talked to me through the closed door. What she said—well, that's only for her and me. I saw at



last what a mad fool I'd been. Then—then she threw herself on my mercy."

"You seem to have played the man."

"She'd make a man of a snake! I saw myself in my true light at last; and I understood *her* at last. God bless her!"

"Amen!"

"We ran on down to Old Point Comfort, and the chaplain at the fort married us that same night."

The two men shook hands.

"After we left Old Point," went on Danton, "we cruised about a bit, got mussed up by the storm, and ran in here. And then you—you and *Betty* appeared."

His emphasis brought a penetrating look from Fessenden.

"You said you were telling me a parable. You don't mean—surely you can't—*Betty*!"

"I do."

"Do you dare to think——"

"I don't think anything. What I say is that my case furnishes a parallel to yours."

"Speak out, man! What! You mean you think I ought to marry her?"

"Well, then—yes."

"Good God! Marry *Betty*!"



“Yes.”

Fessenden rose abruptly to his feet and walked away a few paces. He stared unseeingly across the stretch of sand to the sea beyond.

A hundred images of Betty flitted before his mind's eye—images graceful and smiling, sad and gay, merry and serious, always infinitely winsome. Her voice sounded in his ear—teasing, angry, kind—always low-toned and charming.

He faced Danton. “Marry her? I’ve been wanting to do that very thing since the first minute I saw her—only, I didn’t know it.”

His friend’s face shone with relief and pleasure. He broke into a boyish laugh.

“Great!” he said. “You’re the right sort, Tom. I knew it, and I told Madge so.”

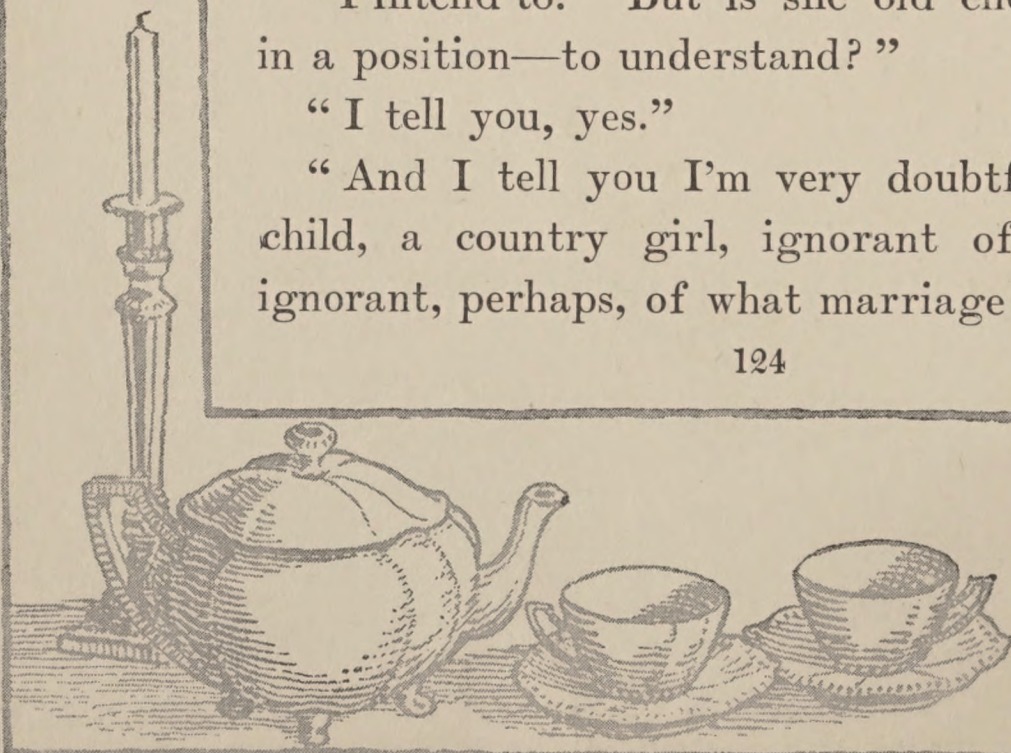
Fessenden could not respond to the other’s mood. “All very well. But what will Betty say?”

“Ask her.”

“I intend to. But is she old enough—is she in a position—to understand?”

“I tell you, yes.”

“And I tell you I’m very doubtful. A mere child, a country girl, ignorant of the world, ignorant, perhaps, of what marriage means! It’s



a hard position for me, and it may be worse—it may be horrible—for her.”

“Ask her,” repeated Danton. “Look there!” He levelled his walking-stick. “Do you see the dunes there—the second hill? Somewhere beyond that you’ll find Madge and Betty.”

Without another word, Fessenden pulled his cap over his eyes and strode off.

He skirted the first hillock, and on its farther side came abruptly upon Madge Danton. She gave him a warm hand. Her eyes had lost their defiant look; rather, it seemed to him, they included the world in their gentle glance.

“You’ll find her beyond the next hill,” she said.

“You’ve talked to her—as Danton talked to me?”

“Yes. She understands—her position. I know I don’t need to warn you to be—careful.”


“No, no.”

He did not find Betty beyond the next hill, nor the next. But, hastening down the hollow ways, he almost stumbled over her at last—on a sunny slope above the sea.

She looked up at him, her eyes as clear as crystal. “Hello, Boatswain Bob!”

The greeting steadied him immeasurably. He





knew that not so much what he should say in the next few minutes, as how he should say it, might determine the course of their lives. He longed with all his strength to be given a divine tact and a divine gift of speech.

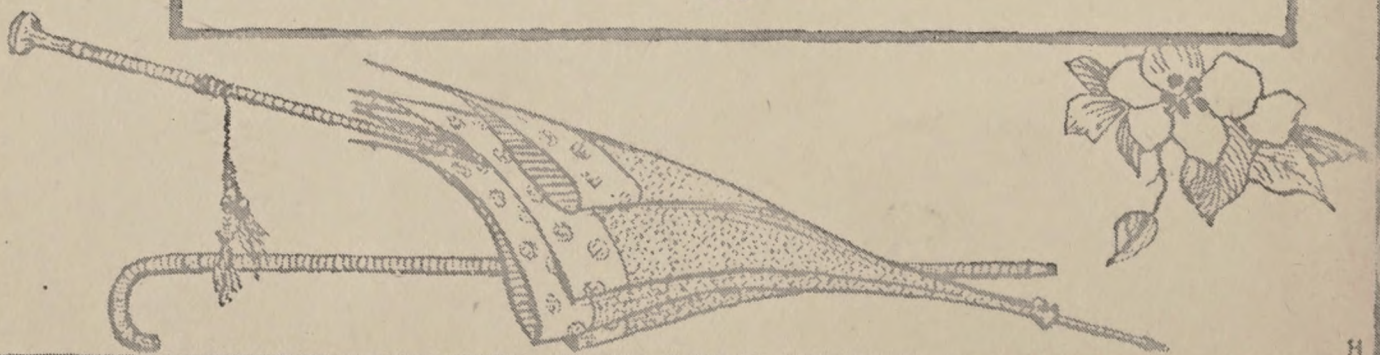
He threw himself on the sand at a respectful distance. "Hello, Nancy Lee!"

Thanks to Kitty Hawk's "Bazaar," a scarlet ribbon again shone at Betty's throat. Her hair was as he had last seen it—coiled superbly about her head. Again he felt the air of dignity and aloofness of which the coiled hair seemed the symbol.

Fessenden's eyes, quiet and tender, met her own, his glance as clear as hers.


"Betty," he said, very simply, "we've been through a lot together, and I want you to marry me. Will you? Don't think I'm asking you because of any chivalrous fancy. I want you because I love you, and for nothing else in the world." His own words fired him. "Dearest, I've loved you since the first minute I saw you. You know that—in the bottom of your heart, you know that's true."

Her eyes, which at first had met his unwaveringly, quailed a little. The red crept slowly into her cheeks.





ALL THE CHIVALRY IN FESSENDEN'S NATURE STIRRED AT HER WORDS



"I'm only a—a country girl," she said. "And you're the famous Mr. Thomas Fessenden. I didn't know your real name until Madge told me, you know."

"Will you marry me, Betty?"

She eyed him soberly. "Madge said I *must* say yes, if you asked me."

"You poor child! Don't mind what she says. I want you to love me, if you can."

"I like you thoroughly, Bob White."

"Is that all?"

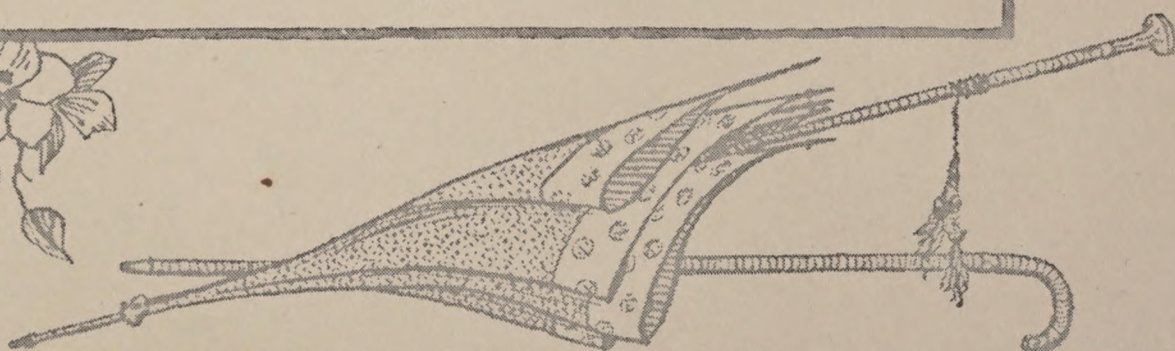
"That's all—I'm sorry," she answered gravely. "To marry a man, and not to love him, would be—horrible."


All the chivalry in Fessenden's nature stirred at her words. His clenched hands sank to the wrists in the soft sand, and his voice shook a little as he answered:

"Not if—if we marry, and still remain only—friends."

Her glance searched his soul. "O-oh! Can you—mean what you say?"

"I give you my word of honor. Do you remember that night—good heavens! was it only last Friday?—that night I had supper at your house, and what I told you when you looked as if





you were willing to say good-night in a certain way? ”

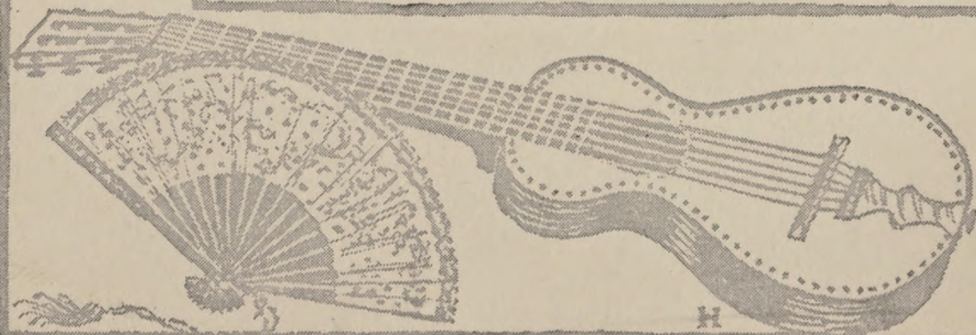
“ I remember.”

“ Well, I’ll stick by that.”

She rose to her feet.

“ You haven’t answered me yet,” he protested.

Her face flushed exquisitely. “ There’s a church in Kitty Hawk,” she said. “ And I believe a minister comes over from the mainland once a month. Madge says he is due—to-morrow.






XII

THEY were married in the little Kitty Hawk church at noon the next day.

Before the hour of the wedding came, certain matters had been attended to. Letters had been written in time to catch the launch which would return with the minister from Kitty Hawk to the mainland. The clothing stock of the "Bazaar" had been materially reduced by the demands both Betty and Fessenden had made upon it. The *Wisp* had been loaded with everything in the way of food, water, and utensils, that could be needed for a fortnight's cruise.

"Why bother with the sloop?" Danton had demanded. "There's plenty of room on the *West Wind*. We can all go honeymooning together, eh, Madge? Over to Bermuda, if you like."

To Fessenden's infinite relief, Betty had declined this well-meant offer. "No, thank you," she had said, blushing a little. "After to-night,



I'll go back to the dear little *Wisp*—where I'll belong, you know. Bob White is going to take me down through the sounds, and then back through the Dismal Swamp, home."

Madge and Danton, supplemented by the entire crew of the *West Wind*, were the witnesses at the wedding.

It seemed to Fessenden that Betty's eyes were bluer than the sea that broke on the inlet bar, and the light in them more mysterious and wonderful. She looked a fair and innocent child.

He answered the minister's questions, and even signed the marriage certificate, in a sort of daze, a daze from which he roused himself only after they had eaten the wedding breakfast on the *West Wind*, and having boarded the *Wisp*, were waving farewell to the others across the water.

Betty serenely assumed command. "I'll take the wheel, Boatswain Bob," she said, "and you get up sail."

He cast off from the float, and set jib, flying jib, and mainsail in a trice. As the sloop gathered headway, the helmswoman stood under the stern of the larger yacht.

"Good-by, good-by, children," called Danton patronizingly.



"*Bon voyage*, children," chorused Madge.
"Be sure to love each other."

"Good-by, old married people," retorted Fessenden.

The *Wisp* stood wing-and-wing down the sound. Fessenden lounged at his ease beside the charming captain.

"Betty," he said, "has it yet occurred to you that you are really my wife?"

She gave him a swift, half-frightened glance. "No-o. I haven't really had much time to think about it, you know."

"Just now it came over me in a sort of wave. If you don't object, I'll call you 'dear' occasionally, simply to assure myself it's true."

"Whenever you like," she returned politely.

"Dear!"

"Oh! That's rather—pronounced, isn't it?"

"Very well pronounced. Very pleasant to pronounce, in fact."


She sat down trustfully beside him, a guiding hand on the wheel. "Do you know, Bob White, I've often thought it would be delightful to sail like this with a rather good-looking—comrade?"

"Am I the man, may I ask?"

"You are."

"Thank you—dear. And do you know that





for the last two or three days I've been thinking I'd give my hope of salvation to sail like this with Betty Landis?"

She gave him another quick glance. "With whom?"

"I mean with Betty Fessenden, of course."

"O-oh!"

"I'm dreaming now of sailing on and on with her. The other night I dreamed that she put 'dear' after my name, and that if we could only sail and sail long enough she might do it again."


His half-closed lids hid the warmth in his eyes, but his voice shook with the passion he struggled to control. She shrank a little.

"You needn't," he said. "Please don't. You can trust me absolutely. I—I was merely dreaming, you know."

"I didn't mean to hurt you, Bob White—dear. Trust you? My presence here shows that I do—you know that." Her fingers touched his hair so fleetingly that he hardly dared believe she had meant it for a caress.

Presently she relinquished the wheel to him and took his place among the cushions.

He noticed how round her throat was, and how deliciously white. The rose-tipped chin and red mouth held him fascinated, until the glint



of bayonets in the eyes warned him to control his glances.

"You're the most adorable skipper I ever saw," he declared.

"I've a confession to make, Boatswain."

"Confess then, Nancy Lee."

"My ankle wasn't hurt that day in the brook. I didn't really stumble."

"What!"

She nodded contritely. "No. I did it on purpose. Wasn't it perfectly shameless?"

"I've had a far-away feeling that you made a miraculous recovery from that strain. But why did you pretend?"

"Just as a game. I wanted to see what the—the good-looking stranger would do."

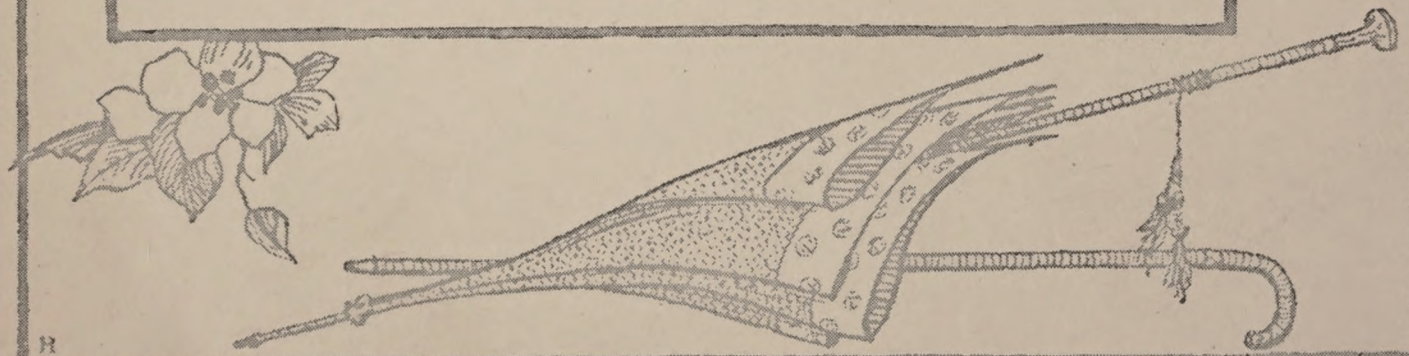
"You found out."

"Goodness, yes, didn't I!" They laughed together at the thought.

"Madge and Charlie Danton," she went on—"do you think they're really in love? I mean, do you think their love will last?"

"Don't you?"

"Ye-es, I do. She has just enough *esprit de diable* to hold him. It is 'infinite variety' that pleases him, I fancy, and Madge is twenty women in one."



"You're a philosopher. By the way, where did you learn French? Do they teach that in the 'little red-roofed schoolhouse' in Maryland?"

"Haven't I told you about my teacher? And I went to a very good school in Baltimore, if you please."

"That reminds me that I know hardly anything about my own wife—only that her name was Betty Landis. You once told me that your mother was well-connected, Betty. Who was she?"

The mainsail sheet, which she had been carelessly handling, at that moment slipped through her fingers, and the boom went flying out. He was barely able to keep the sloop from jibing.

"Be careful, child," he warned. "Take a turn or two around that cleat there."

"Bob White," she said, when affairs were again in order, "I've been thinking—of what you must be giving up in marrying *me*. I don't mean only your bachelor freedom, although I know that's precious to a man. But you are giving up—everything."

"I'm lucky to get the chance."

"Perhaps I've spoiled your career."

"Nonsense!"

"It may not be nonsense. You are a man of





ALL THAT GOLDEN AFTERNOON THEY SAILED, AND ALL THE AFTERNOON
THEY TALKED

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a different world from the country one you found *me* in. It was only an hour ago we were married, but I can see already that I was perfectly mad and unutterably selfish to let you sacrifice yourself for me. A braver girl—a better girl—wouldn't have cared what silly society might say. I was wicked to marry you!"

"Tut! tut!"

"I'm perfectly serious—miserably serious."

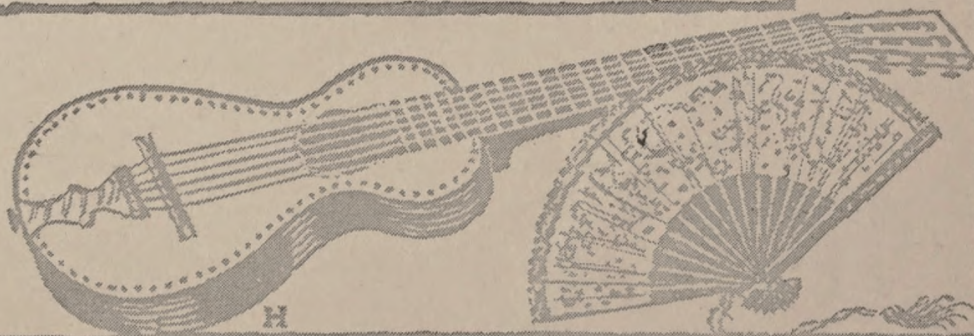
"Then I'll be serious, too. I admit that you and I ought to be different, but we aren't. I don't know why it should be so, dear, but we both 'belong.' We're the same sort. You must feel it as well as I."


All that golden afternoon they sailed, and all the afternoon they talked. Her mind played with a hundred fancies, grave and gay, and Fessenden heard her with delight, and with ever-renewed wonder. She seemed to him a sort of Admirable Crichton, possessing heaven-sent intuition of all that was rare and charming and useful.

At dusk they lowered all sail, let go the anchor, and made the sloop secure for the night.

Then, with his respectful help, Betty cooked the dinner, and served it on a camp-table in the cockpit.

That dinner was Olympian. A sirloin steak,





deliciously broiled—"I intend to give you a *man's* dinner," she had declared; French fried potatoes, as hot as the flames they came hissing from; coffee, as clear as amber; and fresh tea-biscuits which one was allowed to dip in Kitty Hawk honey.

When the dinner things had been cleared away, they sat under the stars and watched the lights twinkle here and there from lonely cabins along-shore. Now and then Betty's fingers strayed over the guitar she had borrowed from the *West Wind*. The light breeze sighed an answer through the cypress and tamarack trees of the swampy cape near-by.

Betty pointed dreamily shoreward. "The 'swampers' down here are a wild lot. During the war my uncle was attacked by them—on the way down to his district."

"His district?"

"He commanded the Eastern Military District of North Carolina, you know, and—and——" She broke off abruptly. "Oh, dear! My foot's asleep—terribly! Will you put a cushion under it for me?"

"One minute," he said. "I don't quite make this out. If your uncle commanded a military district here during the war, he must have been

a Federal general, a man of distinction, yet you——”


“ My foot’s asleep, and prickles dreadfully.”

“ Just a moment.” She could feel the growing fixedness of his glance. “ I—remember—this sort of thing has happened before. On the island—Rincoteague—when I asked you what you knew about Madge Yarnell, you suddenly discovered that it was raining. This morning, too, something was said about your mother, and somehow the sail got adrift at that very moment. You had hold of it. And just now your foot falls asleep in the nick of time. Betty, I don’t like this sort of thing! I’ve had enough confidence in you to marry you—to marry you very much in the dark. Isn’t it fair you should have confidence in me, a little? ”

She was listening with half-averted face and a smile that baffled him.

As he watched her, a score of confusing recollections rushed through his mind like fiery phantoms: Madge Yarnell’s recognition of the envelope received from White Cottage; her determined effort to accompany him thither the next day; her theatric assault upon them, whip in hand, on the road from Jim George’s—even yet he found it






hard to believe that they had narrowly escaped a tragedy!

Harry Cleborne, Fessenden had then imagined, had warned him against his pursuit of an innocent country girl, and had puzzled him by obscure reference to another man, and on top of this had denied all knowledge of Betty Landis.

He recalled a hundred reticences and reservations on the part of Betty, natural enough at the time, but now possessed of a disturbing significance. Her knowledge of the world; her voice and bearing; the words she had let slip of her mother, of her Baltimore friends and school, of her uncle, the Union general! What did these things mean?

Light began to break upon him. Madge had not pressed upon them that day because she had discovered only him where she had expected to find Danton. Cleborne had really babbled of Danton and the Other Lady. Danton himself, in their talk on the beach at Kitty Hawk, had said that the Other had been in seclusion—hiding from his pursuit of her—in a farmhouse on the Eastern Shore.

He towered over Betty in sudden fury. "What! What *is* all this? Who are you? Who are you, I say?"



The smile died from the girl's lips, and she shrank before his white face and fierce eyes.

Shame and rage so choked him that his words were almost incoherent, but they were the more terrible for that. She cowered away from him to the very limits of the gunwale.

"Oh, please!" she said. "Don't! Don't! Oh, please!"

The tenderness he had lately felt for her came over him in a wave as he looked down at the shrinking figure.

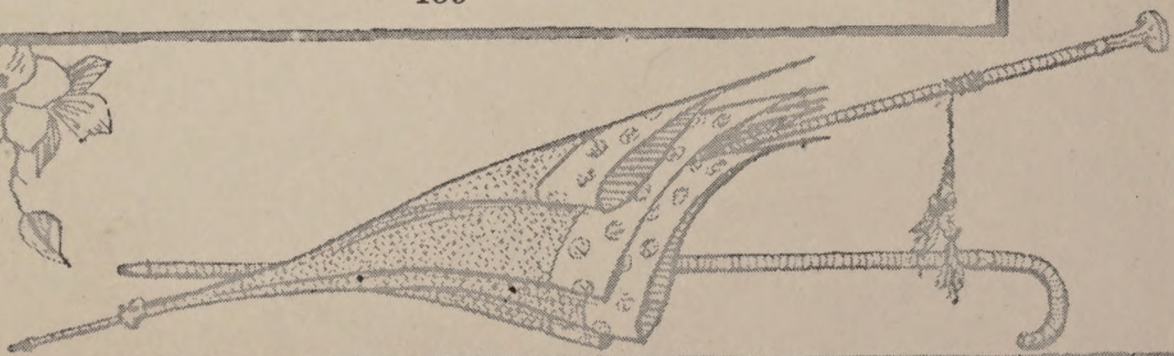
"I—I beg your pardon," he said. "I lost my head. Don't be afraid—it's all over now. I beg your pardon."


Without another word or look he turned and sought his room in the forecastle.

Half an hour later, as he lay staring into the darkness, he heard a muffled beat, as of a drum. Betty was playing her guitar in her room.

Gradually the drum-beat increased and quickened until it grew into a continuous roll, a throbbing cadence that thrilled through and through him. The roar of the wind and the mutter of the sea were in the shattering roll of the drum.

At the very height of its clamor—while he strove in vain to catch its meaning—it passed abruptly into silence. He was left staring into the dark.





XIII

TOWARD midnight, the girl lying wakeful in the after cabin heard a tap at the door.

"Betty, are you awake?"

"Yes."

"Don't be frightened, but I think there may be a little excitement out here pretty soon."

"What is it?"

"Some of the 'swampers' up to a bit of thieving, I fancy."

"I'll be out in a moment, Bob White."

She found him, clad only in shirt and trousers, leaning against the side of the cabin, and staring shoreward. She divined his frank smile, and smiled in return.

"Thieves?" she asked in a whisper.

"I'm almost sure of it," he answered in the same tone. "I heard a boat bump against the side of the *Wisp* a few minutes ago. I think they were drifting down with the tide to reconnoitre,

and were swept in closer than they had expected to be."

"Have you a pistol?"

"On the locker there. Lucky Danton lent me one of his. You aren't afraid?"

"Not—with you."

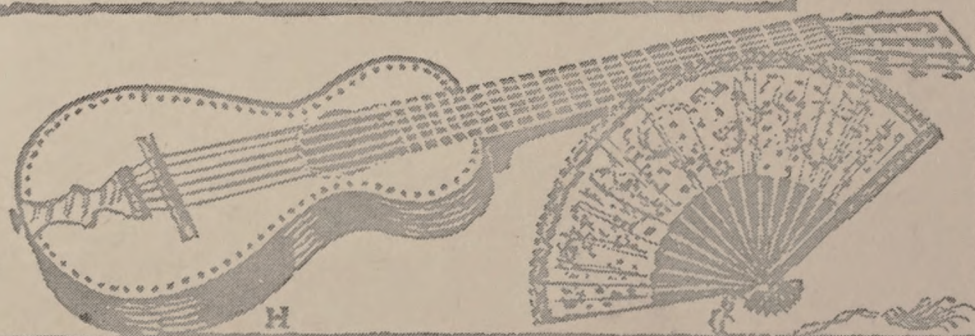
"I dare say they won't come back. Listen now! See if you can make out anything to starboard. I'll watch on this side."


The night was very dark. The stars were obscured by light clouds, nor was there a moon visible. Their eyes could penetrate the darkness little farther than the rails where a whitish mist hid the surface of the water.

Betty gazed intently. A sidelong glance showed her Fessenden kneeling on the locker opposite her, his half-bared arms folded on his chest. His powerful form gave her a comforting sense of protection. She stared again to starboard.

From the mist two great hands gripped the rail of the sloop! Then a face—the face of a negro—rose into view, a knife gripped in his teeth. So impossible, so barbaric, did the apparition seem, that for a long breath Betty stared spell-bound.

Then her scream whirled Fessenden about. He crossed the cockpit at a bound, and struck sav-





agely at the negro's jaw. The latter ducked with the skill of a trained boxer. Throwing up a hand, he caught the other by the throat, dragging him forward.

Fessenden struck again, grappled with his antagonist, tottered, and plunged headforemost over the rail upon him. Both went down struggling wildly.

Betty snatched up the revolver, hardly knowing what she did, and stared down upon the boiling water.

Fessenden's ghastly face, his groping fingers, his throat from which stood up the handle of the reeking knife! The possibility of these things strained her mind to the breaking point. A horror of what the loss of him would mean to her drew a piercing cry:

"Bob White! Oh, Bob White!"

As if summoned by the sound, the two men rose into view—a yard apart. Betty fired on the instant. The shot went wild, but the negro, for the first time aware that firearms were at hand, dived deep. They saw him but once again, his head a black spot in the mist as he swam frenziedly for his drifting punt.

Her shaking hands helped Fessenden over the rail.



“You — that dreadful knife! — you aren’t hurt?”

“I knocked that out of his mouth the first thing. A couple of teeth along with it! But the fellow can swim like an alligator—he would have drowned me at his leisure, if you hadn’t fired. Thank you, child.” He patted her shoulder. “The row must have been rather rough on you.”

“It doesn’t matter—so long as you’re safe.”

“It’s all right. Well, that ‘swamper’ won’t bother us any more to-night, I’ll swear—so I’ll get out of these wet togs. Lucky they’re the flannels I borrowed from Danton.”


She reached both hands to his dripping shoulders. “Tom! Tom! I want to talk to you.” She was laughing, yet half in tears. Oh, it’s ridiculous—it’s pitiful to think we are husband and wife, and—and you don’t even know my real name.”

He stared down at her. A slow tremor shook him. “Then you admit—that I don’t?”

“I know you don’t, you—you silly boy! Go and change your clothes. Then come back and talk to me. Come soon!”

In a wonderfully short time he rejoined her. Only his damp hair showed his late struggle with





the robber, but his very quietness betrayed his emotion.

She was awaiting him on the cushioned locker, a lighted reading-lamp beside her.

"Sit down here," she said. "Close! You needn't be afraid of me. I—oh, I've a hundred things to say to you!"

"Good. It was thoughtful of you to bring out that lamp. I can see your face better while you talk."

"And I yours—you dear boy."

"Betty! Be careful what you say. I've got myself pretty well in hand, but I can't stand much of that sort of thing."


She laughed deliciously. "I brought the lamp to let you read something." She produced an official-looking document. "Look at this. Do you know what it is?"

He peered at it. "No-o. Yes, of course. It's our marriage certificate, isn't it?"

"It is. Mr. Thomas Fessenden, do you realize that you signed that document some twelve hours ago and didn't even read the name just above your own?"

"Above mine? That must be *your* name, Betty!"

"Of course, silly boy. But you haven't yet



seen it. You were so excited that you may have married an Abiatha Prudence or a Mary Ann, for all you know."

He gave her a penetrating glance, then snatched up the lamp and held it so that its rays fell full upon the certificate.

Just above his own signature was another in a feminine hand: "Roland Elizabeth Cary."

He repeated it stupidly, "Roland Elizabeth Cary."

She nodded, blushing hotly.

"You?"

"Yes—please."

"Not Landis?"

"She was my old nurse. I've always called her Aunty Landis."

"*Roland Cary* that they all talked about! Not a man, but *you*?"

"Are you awfully disappointed? I was named after my great-uncle, General Roland Cary."

"Great Scott! Polly Cresap said *Roland Cary* was charming. Mrs. Dick Randall told me that he—no, that *Roland Cary* was a 'dee-vil.' Cresap quite raved over—over Roland Cary. I've been as blind as an owl!"

"It was wicked of me to fool you so long, but

it was such a joke. All my cousins always call me Roland Cary, as if it were my only name."

"Then you're Elizabeth Cary—the Miss Cary of Baltimore that people made such a fuss about when you came out last year—'the' Cary of 'the' Carys?"

"I suppose I am."

"I hope you'll give me credit for never believing that you were an ordinary person."

"Yes, I do."

"But *why* did you do it—masquerade in the Landis farmhouse? I remember somebody said 'Roland Cary' had 'notions.'"

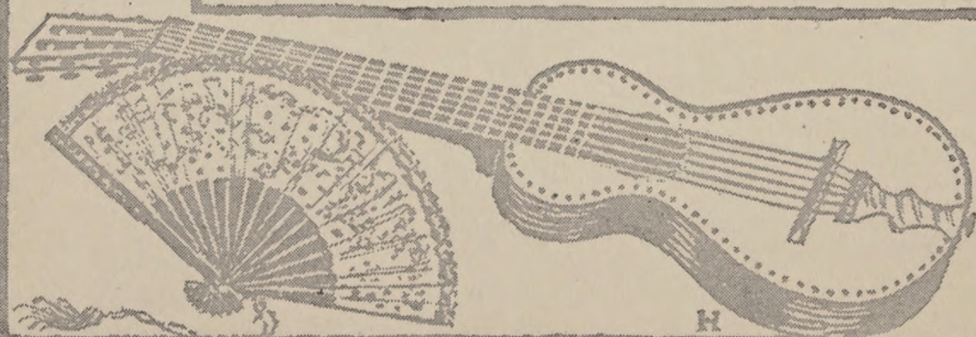
"I did it to be near a friend—to have a chance to shelter a friend without attracting notice. A woman—the Other—the one that Charlie Danton——"

"O-oh! It must have been she Cleborne saw at the window—and I thought he was warning me about you!"

"I kept her out of harm's way—really in hiding. I didn't know how it would all end, but it did end perfectly."

"You mean that Madge Yarnell ran away with Charlie Danton, and solved the problem?"

"Not only that. The very night before *our* elopement—yours and mine—she received a letter,



a *dear* letter, from her husband. They'd been on the point of making it up for weeks. You see, nothing *impossible* had occurred."

"I see."

He had put down the lamp so suddenly that the light had flickered out. The mist was gone, and the velvety blackness stretched unbroken from shore to shore. Far down the sound, the red rim of the moon was rising from the water.

"Child," he said, "for a young woman of your position you have married in a very reckless and off-hand way."

"I knew you were—real. I knew I could trust you."

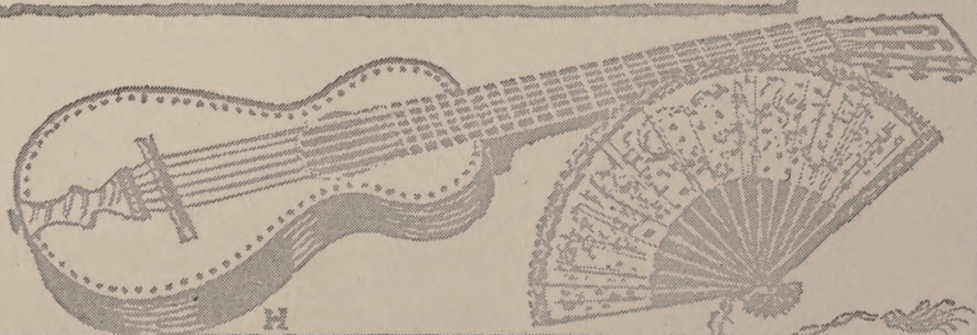
He gave a short laugh. "Thank you. But if we're going up and down this weary world in—in this fashion, forever, I think I'll soon begin to wish that the 'swamper' had put his knife into my heart."


She caught him tenderly by the chin. "Oh, Bob White! If you had never come back to me—out of that black water!"

He trembled from head to foot. "Betty!"

"I know—I know. Dear—will you kiss me?"

"For God's sake, Betty! You don't know what you're saying. After all, we're husband and wife—a kiss between you and me can't be





play any longer. It means—it *must* mean—everything.”

She leaned toward him, her eyes exquisitely tender.

“I know, dear,” she said. “Must I ask you again? Will—will you kiss me?”

THE END.



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